

# SHORE

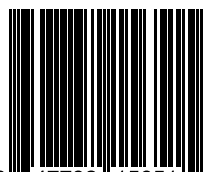
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Anne Altavater and Otto  
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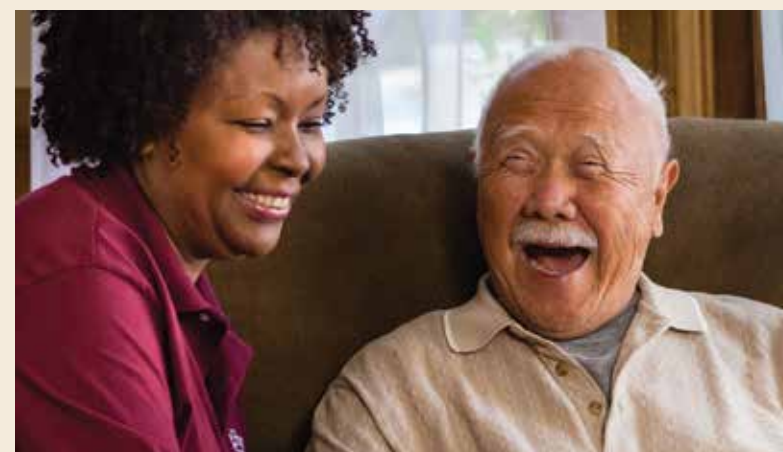


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By: Ryan Helfenbein



## Ask the Undertaker

Waking up each and every morning to the news about the COVID 19 pandemic has for all of us moved from the realm of a movie plot to reality. The part of me that is an undertaker is heartbroken as I begin to learn how this pandemic can complicate what has been a customary way to cope with the loss of a loved one. The power of a hug, a hand on a shoulder and a share in feelings is something that I have come to believe are necessities for the grief process after a loss. These expressions of compassion have traditionally been conveyed while attending a visitation and/or a ceremony, a Celebration of Life or even a backyard party to pay tribute to a life lived. No matter what the method of final farewell is chosen, being with others is often at the foundation of coping with a loss. How to provide this time of comfort during a pandemic is now what keeps me up at night. Challenges such as gatherings of no more than 10, funerals being legally banned and nursing homes not allowing family to be present during the final moments of their loved one's life are changing how we'll be experiencing final farewells. These events have become essential to coping with a loss – being together with others in addition to witnessing the reality of a passing.

Guidance was provided early in this pandemic that funeral directors should "remain calm and suit up." This was later followed up with how the virus cannot be transmitted from a deceased. As the days went on, the message changed to how the virus can live on surfaces for long periods of time and recommendations on the proper methods of disinfection to eliminate the virus after transferring a deceased into our care. But rarely was there guidance to undertakers throughout the country as to how they can provide a proper final farewell, a necessity to those left behind, during this pandemic. Instead we read in the papers how funeral homes are going to immediately dispose of the deceased and how they will eliminate the virus as soon as a deceased comes in contact with funeral home staff. This makes my stomach turn, my blood pressure elevate, and my overall stress level go through the roof! We as undertakers live by an oath to provide care for the departed as if they were our own family members and always strive to ensure that surviving relatives are given the opportunity for proper closure. I stopped reading industry news, ignored the industry emails and instructed our staff to continue to operate by our oath. But the bigger question is how.

Yes, for the present time, large gatherings are a not so distant memory. But that does not mean closure can no longer be obtained and an opportunity for a final farewell be overlooked. Rather, it might

be done a bit different than that of only months ago. Traditionally, when a passing occurred under hospice or in a nursing facility family had the opportunity to be with the individual just moments before or immediately after they pass. With this pandemic occurring today, this is not possible. As undertakers operating by our oath, we can still provide that time of closure today. A small group of the immediate family is welcome to come into a funeral home for a private farewell before the chosen method of disposition is carried out. This is considered an essential time for the immediate family. For family members who have health concerns, or who might be out of town and unable to travel, Zoom or FaceTime are being used to limit contact with others. If the family strongly urges a religious ceremony, similar technology can be employed for those guests who would like to virtually attend. Expressions of condolence are easier than ever to convey to the family via the funeral home's website, service apps and social media. One of the most amazing testimonies to this was when the online condolences were pasted to balloons, which were then attached to chairs in the funeral home. Each balloon took the place of the individual being present. A minister officiated to an empty room of only balloons and the deceased, while family and friends watched from the safety of their own homes virtually. Just because limitations have been instituted, it does not mean we can't still have a final farewell. We simply need to realize that it will be a little different from what we were accustomed to.

With all this said, we still need the power of people. In knowing this first hand, my family along with a few professionals in other states, have made the commitment to our communities to provide the use of our facility at no charge for a future Celebration of Life - Memorial Tribute. This in turn allows us today to provide proper closure for a very small group of family members, and a complete gathering of friends and family in the future to pay tribute to a life lived.

Ultimately what can be done today will be a bit different from what would have been possible just weeks ago. But out of this will shine the Undertakers who truly care for their community in seeing that each and every family has the opportunity for proper closure. I've said it for years, and it means more now than ever before, undertakers only get one chance at this....so we better do it right. I speak on behalf of all my family and associates that we stand committed to providing you, our community, the continued care you need as we always have before. God Bless.



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# FEATURES



Curious horses peek out of their stalls in unison during our photo shoot of the young women riders on page 33.

PHOTO BY Stephen Walker

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Bridge Views

LEFT: Santiago Almodovar at his Dreamland Studio in Easton

PHOTO BY Caroline J. Phillips

**ON THE COVER**

Anne Altvater and Otto the horse at Campbell’s Lane Farm in Preston

COVER PHOTO BY Stephen Walker





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# editors' NOTE

**Explore the Shore!** Because we spent the last month social distancing in our homes, we wanted to try and bring you some interesting places and people on the Shore to break some of the isolation we have all been experiencing with this global pandemic.

You may have noticed that we have begun issuing the magazine bimonthly. The new bimonthly May/June issue takes us outside to delve into the equine industry. Our cover story explores how horses at Campbell's Lane Farm in Preston is offering people the opportunity to heal, both physically and emotionally, while helping them develop life and coping skills. Learn about how Kenny Wood of Lifetime Wells is using his horse racing winnings to self-fund drilling wells in Africa — over 2,500 wells to date. Also, be inspired by our story about four young women equestrians — jumping, racing and showing horses in a big way.

We also support local businesses, visiting Happy Place, with owner Elizabeth "Happy" Hickman, as she shares her passion and her wildly creative flair in showcasing local artists in a storefront in Easton. We also travel to Chestertown to Figg's Ordinary which checks off all the requirements for today's savvy consumer — gluten-free, no refined sugar, and vegan offerings that still check off the boxes for taste.

In our local people profiles, we share the dream of Santiago Almodovar who started Dreamland Entertainment Group, a record label and music production studio in Easton focused on producing the musical talent on the Shore. Kent County resident Karen Somerville shares



A scenic outtake from our photo shoot at Campbell's Lane Farm on a late March afternoon.

with us her love of blues, jazz and gospel music and how she is using her singing voice to share her faith through her performances across the region. And finally, Matthew Peters of Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center reflects on the immigrant community on the Shore and how his organization is connecting immigrants to the resources, training, and education needed to keep them safe, healthy, and contributing to our communities.

We hope that by the time this issue reaches you, we will be beginning to move more freely about the Shore and maybe finding some normalcy in our lives. Remember the lessons learned through this pandemic and take them with you as we all share gratitude for the beauty and the people of this region which got us through the challenging times.

We look forward to the July/August issue when we explore games and toys for the young at heart on the Shore, as well as what keeps the Shore sizzling in the summer months.

Until then, stay healthy so you can enjoy SUMMER — undoubtedly, the best time on the Shore!

**Amelia Blades Steward  
& Manning Lee**  
Co-Editors

**Correction:** We apologize for spelling our contributing photographer Val Cavalberi's name incorrectly in the April issue.

## SHORE

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PHOTO BY MAIRE MCARDLE

## SHORE LINES

# WHERE THE STORIES ARE



MAP ILLUSTRATION BY LAURA GOODE



# PICTURE THIS



Sunset in Oxford Park is a family favorite.  
Photo by Stephen Walker





An aerial view of Maryland's 5 Star competition fields in Fair Hill, located in Elkton, MD.

INSET: Equestrian Ariel Leamore rides horse Master Plan at Fair Hill where the Maryland 5 Star will be held in October.

# PINNACLE OF EQUESTRIAN PRESTIGE

Maryland 5 Star Event | October 15-18, 2020 | [www.maryland5star.us](http://www.maryland5star.us) | [www.fairhillinternational.org](http://www.fairhillinternational.org)

A 5 Star event is the pinnacle of the sport of eventing. It consists of the most advanced form of competition as it pertains to the skill level executed in the field of dressage, as well as, tougher fencing and obstacles in both cross country and stadium jumping. There are only seven 5 Star events in the entire world, two in the Western Hemisphere, and now two in the United States.

### DRESSAGE

From the French word meaning "training," dressage was originally created to show the horse's submission and ability to perform intricate movements required for cavalry exercises. Today's dressage still consists of an exact sequence of movements. The goal remains that horse should demonstrate balance, rhythm, suppleness and obedience based on the riders cues or "aids."

### CROSS COUNTRY

The cross-country phase typically takes place on the second day of competition, but always after the dressage phase. Cross-country is the cornerstone of eventing, and proves the speed, endurance and jumping ability of the horse over varied terrain and solid obstacles.

### SHOW JUMPING

The third phase, show jumping, tests horses and riders precision over a series of colorful fences made of lightweight rails which are easily knocked down. This final phase tests the stamina and recovery of the horse after the very tiring cross-country phase. Consisting of 12 to 15 jumps in an enclosed arena, show jumping requires exact riding as the slightest bump could cause a rail to fall, resulting in four penalty points.

COMPILED BY MANNING LEE | ECLIPSE SPORTSWIRE; INSET PHOTO BY SHANNON BRINKMAN

# RESURRECTING AFTERNOON TEA

"While there is tea there's hope." — Arthur Wing Pinero



COMPILED BY AMELIA BLADES STEWARD | PHOTO BY MILADA VIGEROVA/GETTYIMAGES

### HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF TEA

- 1368-1644** — Steamed tea leaves were dried and added loose to water and left to steep
- Early 1600s** — Tea introduced to Europe by Portuguese and Dutch traders
- 1658** — Charles II married Catherine of Braganza and tea became fashionable at court
- Late 1600s** — Tea took off in America
- 1840** — The Duchess of Bedford in England requested a mid-afternoon snack which created the ritual of "Afternoon Tea"

### MAKING A GOOD CUP OF TEA

Fortnum & Mason (Est. 1707 as Grocers and Tea Merchants) recommends:

- Buy the best quality of tea you can afford
- Check out new local tea merchant Doehrn Tea Co. [www.doehnrntea.com](http://www.doehnrntea.com) — offering delicious high-quality loose leaf teas and tisanes.
- Fill the kettle with cold water
- Warm the teapot by rinsing it in hot water
- Use 1 tsp. of tea for every ¾ C. of water
- When water is boiling, pour it over the tea and steep for 3 — 5 minutes

### FUN FACTS ABOUT TEA

- America's clipper ships sparked Britain to use its clipper ships to race from China to Britain in Tea Races in the early 1850s
- Tea comes from the evergreen bush, Camellia sinensis and is manufactured into black, green, oolong, white, or puer tea
- Teabags were introduced in 1908 in New York

Footnote: "Tea at Fortnum & Mason," Ebury Press, A Random House Group Company, 2010, pp. 10-20.





# When it's time to get away, Make **MEMORIES** in Kent County<sup>MD</sup>

Soon we will be able to travel again, and when that happens and you're ready to get away and make memories with family and friends, Kent County will be ready to greet you with fresh, clean country air, open spaces, outdoor adventures, and amazing local foods, wines, and spirits.

This bucolic county on Maryland's Upper Eastern Shore embraces its rural lifestyle on the Chesapeake Bay. With plenty of room to explore without crowds, Kent County is known for uncompromised nature, a slew of outdoor activities, a vibrant arts community, more than 300-years of history, and a love of sustainable cuisine—all paired with sweeping river and bay views. In less than a two-hour drive from Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Annapolis you could be on the Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway, leading you to the quaint, historic towns of Chestertown, Rock Hall, Galena, Betterton, and Millington. Peaceful vistas. Beautiful landscapes. Rolling hills. Farms. Vineyards. Open space.

As we're all busy planning on reconnecting with what's important, getting outdoors is an incredible salve for cabin fever, and it's safe to say that Kent County has the perfect options. Only seven miles from the fishing village of Rock Hall, Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge's roads and seven trails offer access for visitors to experience wildlife, song birds and other species-

including our national emblem the bald eagle, paddling an island water trail, soft crab fishing, and 2,300 acres of open fields, forest, and marsh. Picture a family reunion or a friends get together at a pavilion on a bluff overlooking the Sassafras River. At Turner's Creek Park, you'll be delighted with the spectacular views, fishing, and the county landing, where launching your boat or kayak is a breeze. Nearby, the Sassafras Natural Resource Management Area offers an historic tree grove, miles of trails, and Knock's Folly Visitor Center. With 4,000 acres of hardwood forests, wetlands, and open agricultural fields, the Millington Wildlife Management Area is the spot to hear the barking tree frogs sing. Rich in history, it was once the home of the Lenni Lenape Indians. Its trail system is suitable for hiking, cycling, birding, and hunting.

Paddling through the peaceful waters of Kent County can restore anyone's spirits. Protected rivers, coves, and creeks create perfect conditions for smooth paddling, and with 30 landings, more than any other county on the Bay, accessing the water is easy. Be sure to check out the three water trails: Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Chester River Water Trail, and Sassafras River Water Trail. Being home to more than 209 miles of shoreline, it's no wonder that Kent County boasts dozens of full-service and resort marinas, with seasonal and transient docking. Rock Hall has more than a dozen marinas and is said to have more boat slips than its population. On the Chester River you will find the Chestertown Marina, *continued*



OPPOSITE PAGE: The Chestertown waterfront walk connects parks, restaurant, marina, a visitor center amongst a marine store, boat ramp, and historic sites. ABOVE: Paddling the calm waters of Kent County is good for the soul. Rock Hall Harbor, Chester River, Sassafras River, Eastern Neck NWR are just a few favorite spots. Photos by Bernadette Bowman

*Can't wait to see you again . . .*



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a visitor center among a ship’s store, and a public boat ramp. The gorgeous Sassafras Harbor is host to restaurants, an inn, marinas, and some of the world’s most stunning sunsets at the Sassafras River bridge area. While Kent County is known for its picturesque harbors, it is also home to two quaint beaches. Rock Hall’s Ferry Park offers a charming strip of beach, complete with a modest boardwalk, picnic tables, barbecue grills, panoramic views of the Chesapeake Bay and awesome sunsets. Historic Betterton Beach, just 15 miles from Chestertown, is a 5-acre, landscaped park, with a handicap accessible sandy beach, 300 feet of frontage for swimming and 700 feet of shoreline access. It is home to 500 feet of boardwalk, a pavilion, public bath houses, a beach volleyball court, a fishing jetty, public pier, and a restaurant with front row seats to a spectacular view.

Playing on the beach is not the only way to have fun on this scenic peninsula. Anglers look no further, for a fleet of licensed fishing captains are geared up and ready to set you on course to their favorite fishing holes. Ideal habitats offer perfect spawning and nursery conditions for many fish species including Rockfish, Bluefish, Spot, Croaker, Yellow Perch, and White Perch. Cycling is also a great way of exploring Kent County. Enjoy the flat winding roads that make up the Chesapeake County National Scenic Byway.

With all of this activity, you’re going to work up an appetite. Kent County cuisine is as fresh as it gets with plenty of markets, restaurants, and farms. Start with the Farmers and Artisans Market in downtown Chestertown on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon. You’ll find fresh, homegrown produce, herbs, bread, soups, plants and flowers, as well as handcrafted works by local artisans. With award winning chefs, local fare, local wines and spirits, and great service, there is a restaurant for every palate.

Other cravings are satisfied too. A traditionally friendly shopping experience awaits you, from the whimsical shops and antique stores of Rock Hall and Galena

LEFT: Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge. Majestic Eagles are seen year-round. With 2,285 acres, seven walking trails, observation decks, and a boat ramp, this Island is the perfect spot to explore during your visit.

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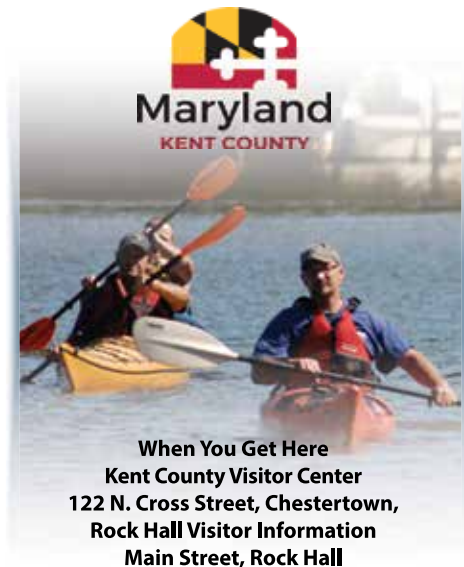
to boutique stores and art galleries and studios in Chestertown, you will find one-of-a-kind gifts, sprinkled with old fashion, friendly service. With more than 20 shops in Downtown Chestertown, you’ll find a variety of stores that include women’s clothing, home goods, wine and cheese, natural foods, eclectic gift selections, children’s clothing, an abundance of fine and crafted artwork, and much more. Galena is where you want to look for that special antique piece. Head for Rock Hall for more special gift options, nautical selections, island-wear, and so much more.

Affection for the Arts runs deep in Kent County. With literally hundreds of resident artists in Kent County, local artwork may be found around every corner. It is no wonder why Historic Chestertown was designated an Arts & Entertainment District. For the music lover, be sure to catch a live performance at The Garfield Center for the Arts at Prince Theatre on High Street in Chestertown and The Mainstay on Main Street in Rock Hall. You will also find other opportunities to enjoy live music at many restaurants, bars and events.

There is something about the peacefulness of country that lends itself to a great night’s sleep. Kent County accommodations range from luxury inns, farm stays, and bed and breakfasts to an award-winning campground, and everything in between. Many Inns provide guests with marina access, swimming pools, stand up paddle boards, kayaks, bicycles, and more. Many welcome your 4-legged family as well.

Be sure to stop into the Kent County Visitor Center at the corner of Maple Ave. and Cross St. to pick up the self-guided Walking Tour of Historic Chestertown. While there, ask about the Museums of Kent County brochure and other historic sites throughout the County.

Surprisingly, Kent County has the best of both worlds—a feeling of remote, untouched land coupled with incredible culinary and visitor offerings. Not a bad way to spend your next getaway from the real world. Make special memories in Kent County, Maryland.



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# PUT ON A HAPPY PLACE

*Elizabeth Hickman is bringing  
a colorful new retail experience  
to downtown Easton*

BY MANNING LEE

PHOTOS BY MAIRE MCARDLE AND STEPHEN WALKER

**A stone's throw** from the Courthouse in Easton is A Happy Place. Perhaps you haven't even discovered it yet. It is well worth discovering. Happening upon the store from the street, you find a surprising and delightful storefront window where you can begin to preview what's inside. Is it an art gallery or boutique? The store's eclecticism beckons you from within.

Once inside of A Happy Place, you discover a menagerie of broaches, buttons, oil paintings, sculptures, pottery, fashion, jewelry, shadow boxes, soaps, silver, and mosaics created by 20 local artists and craftsmen. You can also discover resale fashion, furniture, jewelry and pottery. In every nook and crevice, you see something new.

Elizabeth "Happy" Hickman, the store's owner, passionately describes her artists.

"The sterling silver artist, Lisa Pierson, takes silver, melts it down and with her hands, bends, pries, and twists the silver

Elizabeth Hickman is a creative entrepreneur. She has filled her new gallery-style shop in downtown Easton with an eclectic mix of new and vintage clothing, jewelry, home decor and original fine art.







Shoppers will be welcomed by Elizabeth Hickman's keen eye for merchandising. Everything in the store is artfully displayed.

into beautiful original pieces," she says. "The bead craftsman, Nora Drayton is meticulous. She creates shadow boxes and decoupage oyster shells. Souly Joyce wraps her jewelry in vibrant colors into necklaces, earrings and other fine pieces. Sharon Stockley, a blacksmith artist finds, repurposes, and recycles materials such as wire, metals, and glass, and then hammers, melts, and forms them into both jewelry and sculptures."

"Many of the paintings in the gallery are painted by fine artists in Easton," she continues. "Artists like Diane DuBois Mullaly, Maggii Sarfaty and Katie Cassidy are popular classic, local artists. Customers come looking for their work expect to see Eastern Shore Settings."

Happy continued, "One of my artists is Patrick Henry from Berlin started off his career as an illustrator, but then studied impressionism. He somehow combined the illustration and impressionism developing

his own style! How anyone could combine impressionism and illustration and make it look so perfect amazes me."

"John Sharp, a retired educator (my former vice principal), waterman, and painter's work is the kind of vibrant work that I love so much.

Sharp paints local settings on Eastern Shore from Queenstown, to Kentmoor with the same vibrant flair of Patrick Henry. That's why I told him that I needed his work in my gallery so much because it ties all of my walls together with a perfect mix of vibrancy and mixed with local settings," she added.

In the middle of the store one finds the whimsical yet industrial sculptures of Eddie Ford and the creative basket weaving masterpieces of Heidi Wetzel, but also worth a close look is the resale pottery wall. While the pottery is for resale, it's sold at a such reasonable prices that it is almost too good to pass by. It's worth picking up a piece or two every time you stop in.

The back of the store is a resale boutique dedicated to clothing. The walls are lined with clothes that are on hung chairs. If you find something to try on, the fitting room isn't merely a fitting room, but a place to hide away. Once an office space, it is painted as a wistful waterfront getaway.

Another aspect of A Happy Place is Happy's heart towards our community through special events. The first Friday evening of every month, she invites one of her 20 artists to come and meet the shoppers. The artist shares pieces that the public may not have even seen before like newly finished pieces or rare pieces that will excite the crowds. It's a great time to connect with the real-life artists and talk about what motivates and inspires their work.

While the inventory of A Happy Place is undoubtedly fabulous, Elizabeth "Happy" Hickman gives the store its signature happy. Without her passion and her wildly creative flair, it would just be a store in Easton rather than an experience. There is something for everyone to explore at A Happy Place. ☺

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# FIGG'S ORDINARY SIMPLE DELIGHTS

*Cafe in Chestertown offers delectable takeout meals and treats*

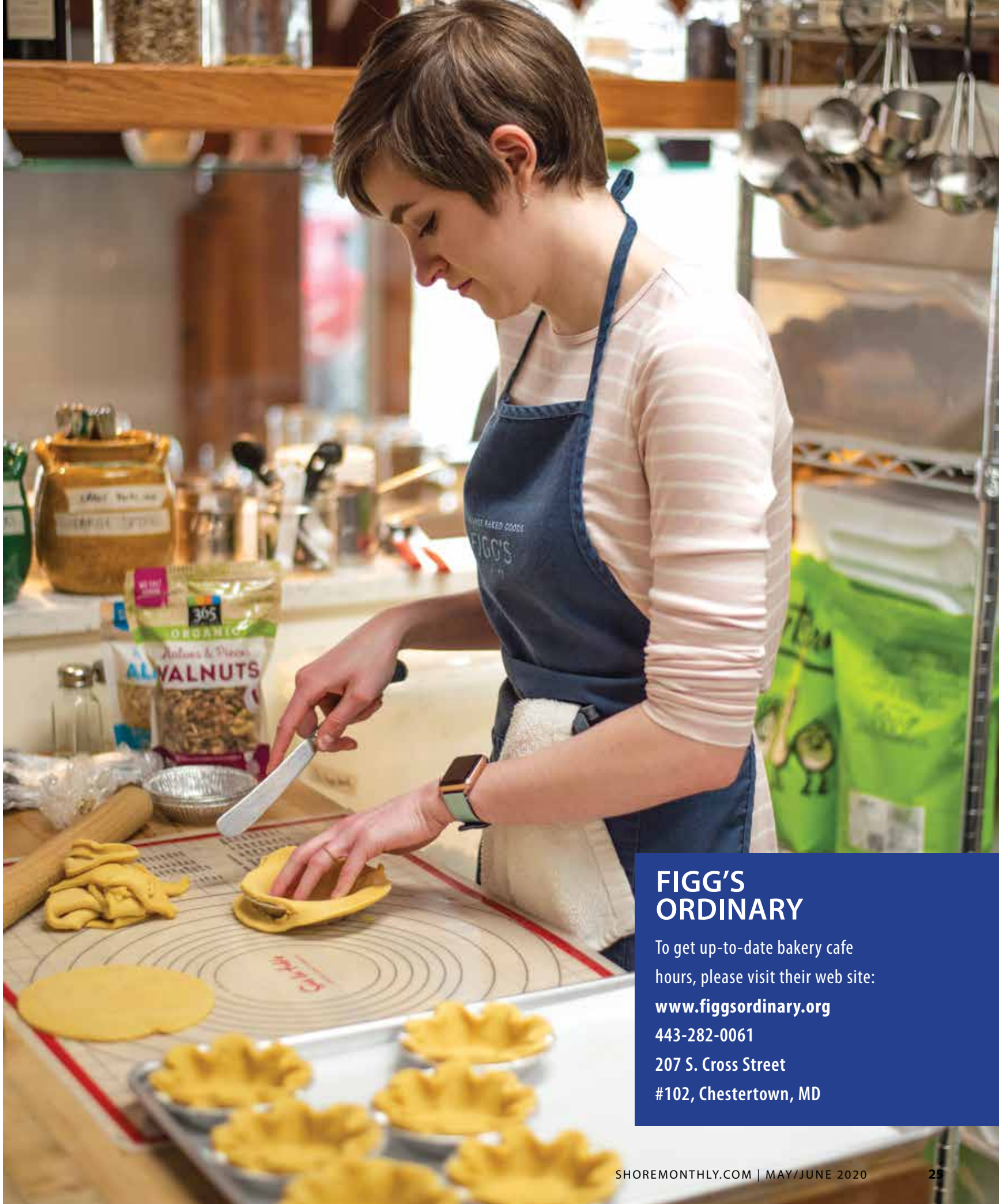
BY MANNING LEE | PHOTOS BY PAMELA L. COWART-RICKMAN

**In keeping with** the ever-demanding desire for deliciously healthy food in Chestertown, Figg's Ordinary was born. It isn't enough these days just simply to cook and serve nice dishes, but today's consumer demands to know where our food came from, is it vegan? Is it gluten free? What kind of sugar does it have in it? How much protein does it have? Least of all concerns for today's educated eater is, "How does it taste?"

Ingrid Hansen, in her former life in Washington, DC worked as an accomplished art historian, director of a nonprofit organization, and also as a curator of a commercial art gallery. For the last 20 years, she's been living both in DC and in Chestertown. Somewhere along the way, she spent more time in Chestertown and now considers it her hometown. Chestertown has that power over people.

Above: Omelets, made with local eggs, vegetables and cheese, are served with homemade gluten-free focaccia bread.

Opposite: On Pie Day, Kellie Guidice prepares gluten-free tarts.



## FIGG'S ORDINARY

To get up-to-date bakery cafe hours, please visit their web site:  
[www.figgsordinary.org](http://www.figgsordinary.org)  
443-282-0061  
207 S. Cross Street  
#102, Chestertown, MD





TOP: Chalkboard tells the story of their beloved dachshund, Figg, for whom the bakery is named.

ABOVE: Tarts, cookies, muffins and quick breads displayed in plain view make decisions difficult.

CENTER: On pie day, employee Brendan McNulty samples an elderflower custard pie topped with elderberry whipped cream.

FAR RIGHT: Exterior of the bakery/cafe.

Hansen's love of food serves as her creative outlet. She'd always baked, but it wasn't until her daughter became gluten intolerant that she began to experiment with ingredients. She discovered that she could make foods she'd always made. With a few adjustments, she could make her favorite thing healthy by replacing gluten and refined sugars so her daughter could still enjoy them.

Hansen's family loved her new recipes, but she wondered how the

public would react to her foods. She signed up for the Chestertown Farmers Market to do some market research of her own.

"I was delighted that there was as much of an interest in the baked goods as there was at the market. It showed me that there was not only a need, but also a desire for a healthier food outlet in Chestertown. Would I make as much at the Farmers' Market in Chestertown as I would in DC? Of course not, but I loved Chestertown and all I

wanted to do was create delicious foods that my friends and neighbors would come to love," explained Hansen.

"We've been open in Chestertown for three years in March," she continued. "Now, my plan is to continue to serve the people of Chestertown at Figg's Ordinary, but also to use the Ordinary as a launching pad to package several of our baked goods and distribute them throughout the region. We are working towards this goal and have packaged granola, power crackers, turmeric cashews, cookies and brownies. Cross Street Market in Galena, Powerhouse Training Facility in Queenstown, and Java George at Washington College all carry our products. Soon they'll be appearing in other fine retail stores."

One of the most popular foods at Figg's Ordinary are the salads. They have a few basic salads. The Taco Salad features Bay View greens topped with Figg's black bean salsa, Hummingbird Farm tomatoes, cheddar, crushed tortilla chips and chipotle vinaigrette.

Protein Powerhouse featuring Bay View greens, amped up with cheese or Figg's turmeric cashews and roasted carrots, topped with activated pumpkin, sunflower, hemp and flaked coconut with a lime cilantro dressing. The Mediterranean Salad starts with Bay View greens and are combined with goat feta mixed olives, Figg's hummus, cucumber, activated sunflower and sesame seeds, served with balsamic vinaigrette.

Rest assured all who travel through Chestertown that Figg's Ordinary not only checks off all the requirements for today's savvy consumer: gluten free, no refined sugar, or vegan. But at Figg's, no one sacrifices smart food for the taste, because the food is just short of ambrosia. ☺

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Vocalist Karen Somerville is pictured at Hope Fellowship Church in Chestertown where she currently serves as Administrative Secretary.

# SINGING FROM HER ROOTS

*Karen Somerville’s songs reach to the heavens*

BY AMEILA BLADES STEWARD

PHOTO BY PAMELA L. COWART-RICKMAN

**“Hardly anyone from** Butlertown, where my mother was born, didn’t sing.”

Vocalist Karen Somerville of Chestertown has used her deep roots in Kent County to launch a music career as a singer-songwriter and producer of solo and group performances in gospel, blues, jazz, and folk music, while never forgetting to shine a light on her faith.

Music pulses through her DNA. Her paternal grandfather was a musician who had learned from his former slave grandparents how to play the harmonica, banjo, and accordion. Her grandmother was from a family of musicians — all great singers.

Somerville comments, “That was the way they socialized, entertained their families and contributed to the community.”

Her parents, Catherine “Kay” Somerville and Alton Somerville were very musical. Her father played the piano and guitar and her mother sang and played the piano.

“Out of the crib, we were singing. My mother instructed us, as young as four years of age, to harmonize by listening with our ears. We were her backup singers. She even dressed us in coordinated outfits to match her dresses, designing and sewing them herself. We were known as the Somerville Family and mainly sang African





American tunes from the A.M.E. hymnals.

Somerville was the only sibling who took singing into a career. She recalls, “It seemed to be something that was happening to me, even if I had wanted to get out of it, I couldn’t.”

At a young age, she was a part of its Celestial Choir for youth and young adults at Mt. Olive A.M.E., her family’s home church. Later, she and two cousins formed a second generation acapella group named after “The Melonaires,” a regionally-known acapella group that her mother and other church members had formed.

Over the years, her jobs included being a radio voice on WCEI and WCTR, and in retail sales management. She quipped, “No matter what job I had, I was always singing.”

In 1996 Tom McHugh, the founder of The Mainstay in Rock Hall, Maryland, approached her to sing in “Lady Sings the Blues” a tribute show to the blues queens for the 20s and 40s. This was her first professional gig. She recalls, “He said he was looking for a particular sound and a voice.”

She remembers asking herself what her grandmother, a devout church-going woman, would think if she sang something other than gospel music.

The show toured for eight years with a blues band and told the story of the blues and how it came from gospel music. She commented, “Since then, I have always included gospel in my shows, leaving the word of God in the room for my grandmother.”

Somerville’s deep faith has sustained her through some dark times, including the loss of her son in 1996 and a serious work-related injury in 2001 which left her with health challenges that kept her from singing for five years. In 2003, while recovering from her injuries, she developed Sombarkin’, an acapella group based on the “singing and praying bands” that had come out of slavery. It was a form of music that combined singing and praying in a continuous way. Her mother had told her about this form of music as a child when she was at church camp. Once choirs and ensembles developed in churches, however, “singing and praying bands” disappeared.



TOP LEFT: Sombarkin’ & the cast of *Red Devil Moon* at the Roberto Clemente Theater New York, NY.

TOP RIGHT: Rehearsal with the Blue Knight Quintet Silver Spring, MD.

OPPOSITE: Sombarkin’ “Blessing of the Fleet” Sailwinds Emporium, Rock Hall, MD. Photo by Art Willis.

“Acapella music originated in black churches where there was no accompaniment. It just happened organically. With Sombarkin’, I created a style which involved getting inside the acapella technique, reinterpreting and borrowing from the singing and praying bands,” Somerville reflected.

She added, “When I was experiencing sleeplessness while recovering from my injuries, I listened to classical music, then I started hearing songs in parts. When I listened to it with a more technical ear to duplicate the sound, I heard harmonies in the layers. I thought I would love to recreate that sound.”

She quips, “I remember having to borrow a bunch of tape players from people to sing the individual parts and record them. I then made a demo tape by playing the individual tapes at the same time.”

When Somerville went to her friends Lester Barrett, Jr., Chestertown, Jerome McKinney from Butlertown — with the idea, their reaction was, “If this is what happens when your mind is recovering from a head injury, what would your mind do when it’s working right.”

Sombarkin’ was born. The group’s name, Sombarkin’, comes from the performers’ last names Somerville, Barrett, and McKinney.

She stated, “In that season, God wanted me to realize that there was still growth in tragedy. He used the injury to illuminate my talent.”

The group was known for their dynamic vocal instrumentation and the polyphonic technique in which they delivered explosive performances in genres from Negro Spirituals to contemporary jazz renditions before retiring its show in February 2020. Sombarkin’ is featured on the album “Rattle Them Chains” by Pam Ortiz. Somerville also worked as executive producer to Mark Bramble (Broadway 42nd Street) in his 2011 production of



Showtime, and the 2014 Showtime II; with Playwright Robert Earl Price as the co-star in the Golden Sardine, and All Blues. In 2014, she and Sombarkin’ debut the original musical theatre, *Red Devil Moon*, story by R. E. Price and music compositions by Chestertown resident Pam Cardullo Ortiz.

In 2014, Somerville had an amazing opportunity on the national music scene when she was asked to join Stevie Wonder’s “Songs in the Key of Life” Washington, DC Tour as a backup singer. A cousin, Marlon Saunders, who originally sang with her at Mt. Olive A.M.E. Church, was now providing background singers for celebrity artists and recommended her for the job.

She recalled, “It was so different. I couldn’t believe I was singing with the 8th Wonder of the World. I usually sang with a five-piece band and while he sang with a traditional band, he also had a string orchestra and a large percussion line. I had to bring my A-game to the show. It was a wonderful experience.”

Over the years, Somerville also had her own shows, many at The Mainstay and the Garfield Center for

the Arts in Chestertown. Her acclaimed performance in her self-produced show “Just Call Me Billie,” a tribute to jazz/blues icon Billie Holiday of the 1930s and 1940s was revived for Billie’s 100th Birthday Bash in 2014 to sold-out audiences through the Mid-Atlantic region. She has produced three albums: *Everyday Is Sunday*, *Love Cures*, and *Our Stories, Our Songs*. “As a whole, I am proud, without false pride, of my journey. I have always held onto and shared my faith — no matter if I am singing the blues, jazz or gospel.”

She has brought her grandmother’s discipline with her along the way — showing love and respect for the woman who inspired her. She adds, “If that had not existed, I wouldn’t have cared what I produced.”

“God just made music and music is music. Like everything else in life, what we do with it, is up to us. I want people to take something away from my performances. God lives in me and I can’t create it without him being in it. I have learned that anytime you ask him to be a part of it, you gotta get the heck out of the way, as he shows up.”





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# Hold your Horses

**Four young women tell personal stories about their commitment and dedication to what they love most: THEIR HORSES.**

BY MANNING LEE

PHOTOS BY STEPHEN WALKER





Adie Parish at the Little Clovelly Farm barns where she rides her horse, Cuba. INSET: Parish at the CPI Invitational at The Ridge at Riverview Farm, Asbury, NJ. 2019. Inset photo by Paws and Rewind.

## Adie Parish

with Cuba

### "We ride as a **team**"

I'm a Junior at The Gunston School. I've been riding for 10 years since I was in second grade. I do hunter jumper events and I compete at local shows in the Chesapeake Bay Horse Show Association (CBHSA). I jump over obstacles and in the flat class, I walk, trot and canter. I also show in Maryland Horse Show Association. (MHSA). In 2018, I was the Grand Champion Non-Hunter Horse and in 2019, I won CBHSA Equitation Class which judges how each rider looks, how well she is positioned, and how she looks on the horse.

I ride for Hilary Gibbons-Neff and every year she takes a group of us to the Interscholastic Equestrian Association. I've been competing with her since ninth grade where we ride as a team. On competition day, you go to the barn and get dressed and ready to compete. Next, we draw to see which horse we ride and that is random. We get one horse for our flat competition and one for the jumping. Since we don't ride our own horses, it makes it interesting since we never know what kind of horse we're going to get.

These competitions are great and it is a lot of fun to be with our friends. Last year I was excited that I qualified for Zone, which is another step. I was excited about that, but even more exciting is that two girls on our team, who are a few years younger than me, qualified for Nationals.







Calista Bell in the paddock at Little Clovelly Farm in Preston, with her flea-bitten grays, C'est Bon and Fable. Inset: Bell competing on C'est Bon at the Prince George's Equestrian Center in 2018; Inset photo by Shawn McMillen.

# Calista Bell

with C'est Bon and Fable

## “Step back and start over”

I graduated from Saints Peter and Paul in 2018 and I've ridden horses most of my life. I compete in high adult jump 3'6-3'9. Last year, in the middle of a competition, my horse and I jumped a bit too fast and too soon and crashed right into the jump. I broke my pelvis in two places, my tailbone, and bruised my ribs and lungs. In April, I had surgery but entered another competition in June right after my surgery.

In August, my horse, C'est Bon, came down with cellulitis and I am unable to ride him until he heals. We bought another horse in October through the Retired Racehorse Project and his name is Bluegrass Demon. I call him Blue. As a retired racehorse, he needs a lot of retraining to become a jumper, but he is a wonderful horse. I work with him seven to eight hours a week. He is a great horse and is working hard. He will be ready soon to compete in jumping.

What I've learned about life through my recent adversities is that sometimes it's better to take a step back and start over. I decided that through everything that I want to become an occupational therapist. I want to work with the horses to help people heal. I plan to study at Towson University.





## Taylor Howard

with Paxton

### “It’s mostly about **trust**”

I’m a sophomore at North Carolina High School. I’ve been riding horses since I was four years old. I compete in hunter jumper events in the .80 meter and also in Equitation. I train at Little Clovelly Farm with Hilary Gibbons-Neff.

I recently had to put my old horse down and someone I knew heard what happened and sold me her horse named Paxton. Paxton is an amazing animal, but it takes time to work with a new horse and for us to learn how to work with each other. I can say that it is a little complicated, but it is mostly about trust. Once we trust each other well enough, then we will do very well.

Our first show was HITS Ocala Winter Circuit in Ocala, Florida. There Paxton and I got third place in the .80 meter. I also competed in the IEA competition with Hilary Gibbons-Neff’s team. I love that competition because there are so many people who compete and my goal for the next year is to move up into a higher level of jumpers into the two-meter jumpers.

I’m a competitive rider, and I’d say I got my competitive spirit from my mother. Speaking of my mother, she also rides in shows. I love that any competition that I’m showing in she is most likely also showing in the competition too. It gives us something to do together as a family.



LEFT: Taylor Howard and Paxton after a grooming at the Little Clovelly Farm. INSET: Howard and Imagine Dragons (aka Paxton) compete in the 2’6” hunters at WIHS local weekend in 2019. Inset photo by Shawn McMillen.



# Rachel Roman

and The Mongol Derby

## “Life shouldn’t be boring”

I’m Rachel Roman, an adventure-seeking, nature-loving athlete who grew up Royal Oak. I spent my whole life on or around horses. What started with a pony in the backyard turned into a lifelong passion for equestrian work. When I’m not in riding boots, I spend the majority of my time outdoors. Growing up, I was always outside tromping in the woods or in the Bay.

The Mongol Derby is the longest multi-horse race in the world. It’s a 1,000-kilometer competition across the steppes of Mongolia held over 10 days and follows the former messenger routes of Genghis Khan with the racers changing horses every 40 kilometers.

I entered the race on a whim. I sat in on two interviews and I was chosen as one of the 47 riders for August 2019. Each day of the race, the contestants pick out and ride a different Mongol Horse. The Mongol horses are one of Mongolia’s oldest breeds. These semi-feral ancestral horses are short, stocky and and super athletic, and are known for their strength to withstand attacks from prey. Riding the Mongol

horse is very different than other horses. The important challenge is just to remain on the horse’s back.

Each day during the race, we would run the horses from one checkpoint to another. At each checkpoint, we were required to check each horse’s health to see if his pulse rate came down and that it cooled down quickly enough. If a horse finished the day too fatigued or overworked, then the rider was penalized with time added to the day’s total. It’s the rider’s responsibility to care for the horse’s well-being.

What I gained from my experience is a love for the Mongolian people. They have a tremendous sense of hospitality. I definitely want to go back and continue entering races. I have my sights set on Race the Wild Coast in 2021, which is in South Africa, as well as the Common Riding Festival which is a festival along the Scottish boarder. I may even try to go back to Mongolia to serve with my friend bringing medical supplies to a remote tribe there. The possibilities are endless. ●



Rachel Roman and Moose, in Monroe, Washington. Photo by Swaephography

OPPOSITE: Roman in the Mongol Derby in 2019. Photos by Sarah Farnworth Photography





Kenny Wood at his well digging company in Denton where he oversees local wells and runs his sulky racing horses and stables.

# adding PURPOSE to PASSION

*Sulky racer Kenny Wood finds a way to save lives using his racing hobby as a means to help*

BY REEN WATERMAN

PHOTOS BY STEPHEN WALKER





Kenny Wood visits his horses in the stables at his facility in Denton.

**Across America** people are changing the world. How? By adding purpose to their passion. When the thrill of chasing another wily whitetail or winning another trophy leaves you feeling empty, maybe it's time to reassess your involvement in your passion. Do you keep engaging in it while accepting your lack of satisfaction or do you try to something different? What about using it for a higher purpose?

Kenny Wood, owner of Lifetime Wells in Denton, Maryland embodies this shift from serving self to serving others. Woods decided to use his passion for "harness racing" horses to change lives. By using his horse racing winnings to self-fund drilling wells in Africa, he continues to provide potable drinking water to over 1,500,000 people in Ghana and Tanzania. (As I was interviewing him, he received a video of his 2502<sup>nd</sup> well in 14 years being completed!)

Growing up on a dairy farm in Denton, from the age of 5, Kenny spent his life working with animals. Kenny's dad decided to expand his business to include raising horses. When someone brought him an unruly horse, Kenny was asked to break the bronco. Kenny soon traded the dairy business for a 40+ year equine passion.

When he raced in his first harness race driving a sulky (a two wheeled cart attached behind a horse) at age 30, he was hooked. "For me, racing horses was therapy. The sheer adrenaline rush of racing a horse in a sulky...trotting at 30 m.p.h. - 35 m.p.h. ...was unbelievable." Sulky racing is a fast-paced sport with 8-10 horses rocketing around a mile track. Back when Wood started racing, a fast run would be 2 minutes. Now a fast time is under 1:49 minutes.

The sport is now very competitive and while horse prices used to be \$1,000 - \$3,000, now horse prices range from \$30,000 to well over \$100,000. When asked why this is, soft spoken and affable septuagenarian Wood replied, "With the coming of slot machines to the tracks, the prize purses have increased dramatically. As a result, more has gone into training and raising horses capable of becoming real winners."

Wood's hobby took a decided turn from passion to purpose after he donated a used well drilling rig to a church in Pennsylvania, finally agreeing to accompany them to Africa to train them. "When I saw how this impacted so many people, it really captured my heart. Seeing how these people had to risk their



lives to walk miles to get water for drinking and cooking— water that you wouldn't even let your dog swim in — I couldn't just go back to my normal life."

Upon returning to Denton, he put plans in place to go back to Africa and drill on his own, doing so by self-funding. "As I have mentioned before...this is all a God-thing. When I started drilling these wells on my own, my ponies REALLY started to win." It was fascinating to sit and speak with Wood about the journey from simply enjoying a passionate and financially rewarding hobby to using his horse-racing proceeds to change peoples' lives.

Wood humbly and genuinely attributes his success in business and racing to his deep, abiding faith. When you see all the trophies and framed photos of his award-winning horses in his office, you wouldn't expect him to be one of the most modest, unassuming, and genuinely nice men you could ever meet. When you are around Wood, you quickly sense his gentle nature, which is one obvious key for success in his life, business, and

PHOTOS COURTESY KENNY WOODS AND ROB SIMMONS



TOP LEFT: Kenny Wood's crew drill a new well at a village in Tundaru District in Tanzania; TOP RIGHT: Well is starting to pump in the Itakara District.

MIDDLE LEFT: Woman in the village collects rain water; ABOVE: Village children watch a drone video the well's successful installation.

LEFT: Kenny Wood and crew beginning to "blow the well" in the Tundaru District.





Early morning exercise around the track at Kenny Wood's farm.

racing. He genuinely cares about helping others, taking care of his horses, and doing the most he can to save lives in Africa.

Discussing the strategy of horse racing he sagely commented, "You have to have good horses to be competitive. I look for good breeding, temperament, and strong mental ability. Believe it or not...horses either have the mental ability to know they can pass other horses, or they don't. God has led me to the right horses. For example, I almost passed, but then decided to buy a "throw away horse" (one that didn't have much going for it). I ended up paying \$15,000 for it and it made me more than \$300,000 in two years."

Wood typically keeps 10 horses in his stables on his 40-acre Caroline County farm. He has four full-time trainers on staff who work the racehorses six days a week. Two of the four trainers have been

with Kenny since they were 16, and one is nearing 60. So, not only is Wood good with horses, but he also takes great care of his staff and everyone on the farm.

Horse racing has gotten a great deal more scientific than it was when he began 40 years ago. Today, there is a lot of maintenance that goes into owning and racing horses. There are nutritional supplements to support joint health, and a wide variety of grains that can impact track performance. He and his team closely monitor each horse's performance and modifies the feed and supplement regimen depending on how each horse races.

Asking what advice he would have for people wanting to enter this arena, Kenny scratched his chin and responded, "I would caution anyone interested in racing. The sport has gotten very pricey. Since the stakes are high, don't get into it if you can't afford to

lose your investment." One can get into racing with as little as \$10,000 to buy part of a horse, but with the associated costs, many owners have partners who share the risk and the reward.

One of Wood's most successful horses, JL Cruze, won numerous trophies and purses totaling over \$1,500,000. Another of his horses won over \$800,000 in two years. With such valuable horses, I asked if he insured them. Shrugging his shoulders, he responded that he used to, but due to high costs he now doesn't. He just takes the risk of losing a horse.

I asked him the obvious question – if he had any spills. With a wry grin spreading across his weathered face he shared one experience from his early years of racing. "A friend had just given me a gorgeous pair of boots before one race. During the race, my cart took a spill (as they often do) and catapulted me into the air. I kid you not...I flew through the air ahead

of my horse like Superman, with my arms out ahead of me. When I hit the ground and skidded to a stop, the emergency personnel swarmed over me. I had to brush them aside to check out my boots before I let them attend to me."

I've had the privilege of knowing Kenny for over 10 years, with his quiet, kind, and soft-spoken manner. When he talks about his ministry in Africa, he speaks volumes with his twinkling eyes. He travels there four times a year, each time staying for three weeks. His wife is 100% behind him, as is his entire family. He has a well drilling company here in Denton, and one also in Ghana and Tanzania.

To expand his ability to provide more fresh water, he founded his ministry, Lifetime Wells International, and its slogan is "Water is Life." To learn more about this, and to support his vision, please visit [www.lifetimewellsinternational.org](http://www.lifetimewellsinternational.org). ●





# heart **to** heart

*Campbell's Lane Farm offers healing experiences with their horses*

BY AMELIA BLADES STEWARD

**“I would not be who I am today** if it were not for horses,” says Anne Altvater of Campbell's Lane Farm in Preston.

She explains that as a child, horses were her sounding board, helping her filter experiences so that she could focus on what was good and healthy. Some of her favorite solitude time growing up was riding with her pony, miles away from home.

Altvater credits her relationship with these four-legged healers as making her who she is today — a skilled horsewoman, an award-winning riding instructor, a compassionate energy healer, and an intuitive equine therapy practitioner.

While teaching others to ride she became aware of how horses can become part of the healing process. She found during the riding lessons that she and the horses were helping people develop life and coping skills.

“When you get around a horse, it filters your energy system, like an oil filter. Research shows that being in the presence of a horse results in a sense of peace and well-being, and produces positive physical benefits, such as reduced blood pressure and heart rate. Horses are very much in the present moment, where all things are possible,” stated Altvater.

In 1999, Altvater moved from Florida, where she had taught riding lessons, back to her grandparents' farm in Preston. She went into business with Jenn

Fox to provide traditional riding lessons on the farm. As the business grew, the two received recognition in the ring. Altvater graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing in 2003 and added individual healing sessions to her offerings. After Altvater completed Shore Leadership in 2018, she became inspired to do more with her business.

“Chasing the blue ribbon wasn't as important to me anymore,” she said.

Through decades of working with children and adults, Altvater has seen that much more goes on in the ring than just a riding lesson.

“Horses offer self-awareness. They mirror what people need to see and hear. I have witnessed the insights that people experience when they come face to face and heart to heart with the horse,” she added.

She began offering healing sessions using her horses to help people make breakthroughs that may not be available in the four walls of traditional therapy. Her clients experience greater self-awareness, emotional well-being, physical healing, as well as problem-solving and personal growth. Clients can be self-referred or referred from a therapist, social worker, or other healthcare practitioner.

“People will notice something they see in the horse which reflects something about themselves. In this heart-centered environment I help my clients interpret their interactions with the horses so that they can find

Anne Altvater and Otto  
inside the training barn at  
Campbell's Lane Farm.

PHOTO BY STEPHEN WALKER





ABOVE: Jenn Fox, Anne Altvater and Nicki Swann, the team at Campbell's Lane Farm.

ABOVE CENTER: The new therapy ring building where Annette Flammia and Taylor, the horse (shown far right) are having a therapy session.

insights and creative solutions," she commented. "People tell me that these transformational moments at the farm have lasting effects long after a session is over."

As a writer, I decided I needed to experience firsthand what Altvater offers. My first experience was with Taylor, a beautiful flea-bitten grey Welsh Cob. It was a rainy, cold day outside. The session began with a conversation with Altvater sitting in director's chairs near a gas-lit fire pit in the farm's new indoor arena built in 2019. I felt as if I was in a spa-like environment awaiting a massage.

Altvater explained that no riding was involved during a session and I could get as close to Taylor as I wanted under her supervision. I have to admit, I am afraid of horses, so when it came time to go into the ring with Taylor, I was a bit apprehensive. Altvater asked what I was feeling.

In those still moments, I got emotional watching

Taylor moving gracefully around the ring — the power, strength, and grace in her movements. I shared I was having a hard time juggling things — with work, COVID-19 stressors, and family obligations. As we began processing some of my feelings, Taylor came and stood close behind me — a position she had not assumed before with me in the ring. In that suspended time, Altvater explained that Taylor was metabolizing my energy field.

The second time Taylor stood behind me, I turned around and faced her. As I did, it looked as if the air cleared and a veil was lifted. Altvater also noticed that my energy field had shifted. I felt as if I was given clarity and shown the possibility in that moment. This time, Taylor laid her head on my shoulder before walking off. We connected in a moment of gratitude.

As I went to process the experience with Altvater outside the ring, Taylor wasn't finished with what she

wanted to tell me. As we discussed some of the challenges, including my lack of free time and fun of late, Taylor began playing with a large ball in the ring, pushing it around with her hoof. Altvater shared that she had never seen Taylor do this. She stated, "Horses ask us to surrender to the moment — surrendering to the information they have for us."

My takeaway from the session that day was that Taylor was helping me process my burdens. I believed as she stood behind me, she was revealing to me that people were standing in the wings to help with my workload and as she pushed the ball across the ring, she was inviting me to introduce more play into my work-driven life.

I asked Altvater what makes a horse so intuitive. She replied, "Through millions of years of evolution horses have become hard-wired to survive by sensing what is around them with acute



PHOTOS BY STEPHEN WALKER

PHOTOS BY WENDY TILGHMAN





accuracy. These instincts keep the horse safe and let them determine how to act in their best interest. This same keen awareness allows them to respond to the inner lives of people they encounter in a healing session.”

“We humans tend to define ourselves by our roles, professions, beliefs, and experiences. We obsess about the past and worry about the future. Horses see through to our hearts where insights arise when we pay attention to what these healers show us,” she added.

As Altvater has gone broader with the scope of her work, Campbell’s Lane Farm has added a variety of other healing services. She and Jenn Fox, who has a degree in early childhood development, began offering child-focused farm experiences. Fox guides children through activities that include horse grooming, feeding and walking; farm play and chores; and other activities that develop balance, fine motor skills, core strength, and flexibility. The sessions can address

children with autism or cerebral palsy, sensory processing difficulties, and mental, emotional or physical conditions.

Leader development programs are offered to corporate business executives, nonprofits leadership teams, and groups from other organizations, to help create self-awareness through team-building and problem-solving exercises. Leader development is also customized for youth groups and teens. Campbell’s Lane Farm also offers Innovative Horsemanship, a program offered to individuals or

ABOVE: A group of social workers enjoy a team building activity at Campbell’s Lane Farm.

INSET: Jenn Fox works with children through the child-focused farm program.

ABOVE RIGHT: Ashley Meissner and Jozi Cross read aloud to Pogo the donkey.

PHOTOS COURTESY CAMPBELL’S LANE FARM

PHOTO BY STEPHEN WALKER

groups, through Altvater and Caroline Lundgren, a certified Natural Horsemanship Instructor who lives in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The transformative “in the moment” experience helps riders become better by developing more effective relationships with the horses they ride.

Nicki Swann, a riding instructor at Campbell’s Lane Farm, uses her flair for fun to create learning experiences for both youth and adults. Swann wrote, produced and directed the farm’s first fundraiser, the mystery dinner show “D-Taned: A Wild

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West Bank Robbery,” which raised over \$4,000 for the Maryland Food Bank. She also creates themed holiday and birthday parties and fun-raisers for local nonprofits; week-long summer camps for children ages five to 10; and day camps during the school year. Swann is writing a series of children’s books with inspiring themes that will be published soon.

“Campbell’s Lane Farm is a place where anything is possible. That is why I get up every day,” Altvater reflected. ●



# Compassionate CHOICE

*One man's service to the Mid-Shore's immigrant community*

BY AMELIA BLADES STEWARD | PHOTOS BY CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS

**"If I hadn't had my journey,** I may have the same opinion as many others have about the immigrant community on the Mid Shore," says Matthew R. Peters, Executive Director of Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center (ChesMRC).

After having spent 13 years working and living in rural Guatemala, Peters has brought a unique point of view concerning the problems and issues that the immigrant community on the Eastern Shore is facing and has a long record of helping those most in need.

"At ChesMRC, our staff has intimate connections to the immigrant community — the vast majority of the population don't have these same connections. My personal connections have made me more compassionate."

After completing a Forestry degree at Penn State University in 1997, followed by a brief service with the U.S. Forest Service and Oregon State, Peters joined the Peace Corps in 1999 so he could experience the forests and jungles of another part of the world. He was drawn to the ecology part of forestry and the experimental work being done, as well as how to keep forests unique.

Reflecting on his choice then, he quipped, "With the Peace Corps, I thought you didn't have to deal with people, just the science of forests. Little did I know."

When he got assigned to Guatemala, he was told the jungle there was too dangerous and isolated, but by 2000, he had pushed to get into the jungle region, hoping it would offer him a unique experience.

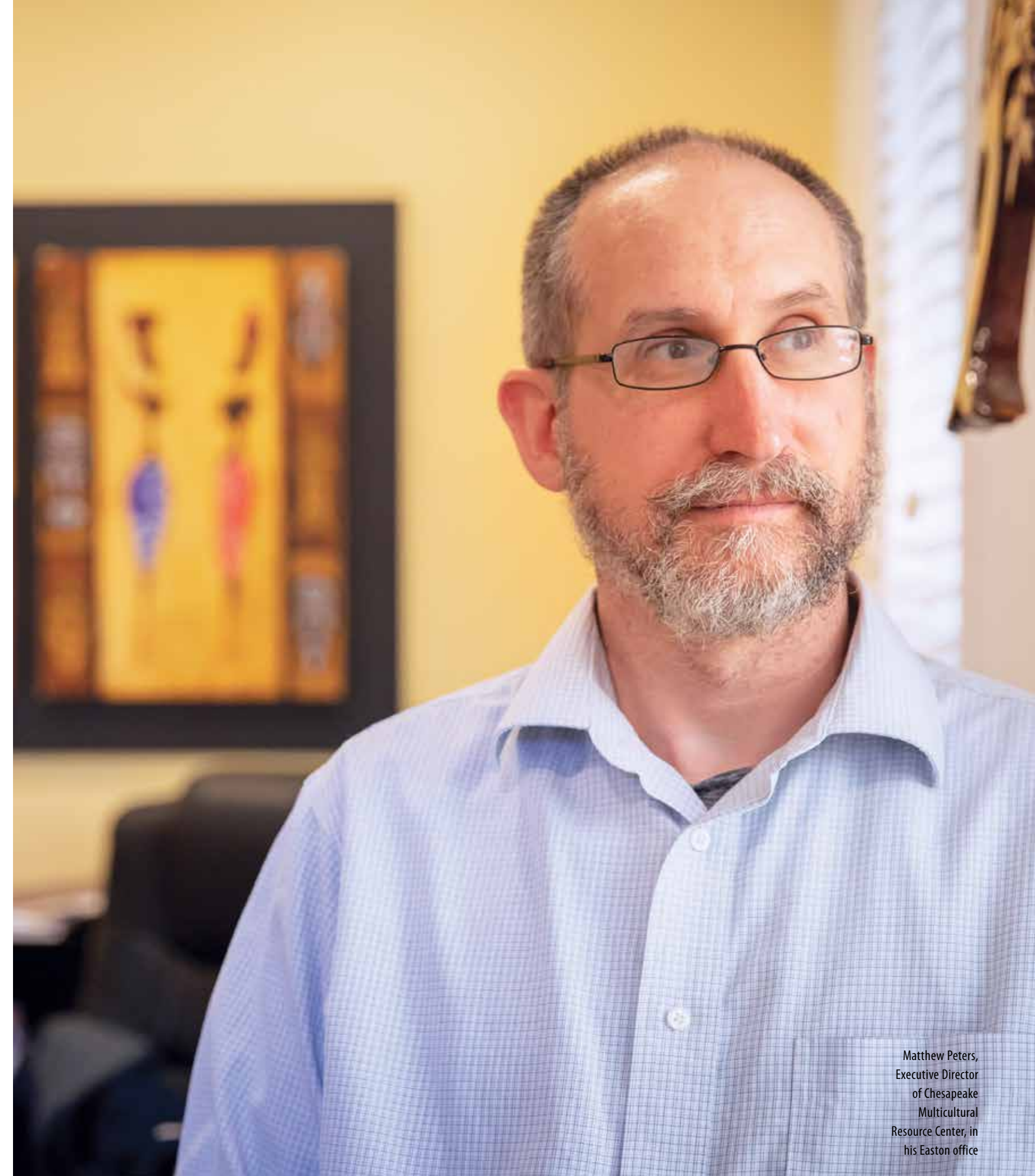
"It felt like rural camping. Very few houses had electricity or running water. I was used to living in these surroundings from my Boy Scouts and U.S. Forest Service years. It became very fun," he added.

Matthew worked on reforestation projects in communities and eventually worked with his town manager in Guatemala to reforest a 150-acre piece of land, experimenting with different reforestation styles and increasing diversity in the forests there. In 2001, his two-year commitment to the Peace Corps ended and he made an agreement with the town to stay, coming back to the U.S. to raise enough money to support his work.

After returning to Guatemala to complete his reforestation project, he had an epiphany about his work.

He recalls, "Someone kept coming and cutting down all my trees after they were planted. I remember that I got angry, then I realized that the people there were threatened by me. I represented their fears of people taking over their land. I was coming at the problem all the wrong way. That was the day I shifted from planting the trees to working with the people on the issues in their town."

In 2002, Peters decided to start a nonprofit organization, Volunteer Peten, developing educational programs for volunteers focusing on natural resource management. The organization trained over 1,000 international volunteers and hosted 90 volunteers a month to come help with the project as mission teams.



Matthew Peters,  
Executive Director  
of Chesapeake  
Multicultural  
Resource Center, in  
his Easton office





"I represented their fears of people taking over their land. I was coming at the problem all the wrong way. That was the day I shifted from planting the trees to working with the people on the issues in their town."

— Matthew Peters

Because 80 percent of the people in the jungle region were illiterate, the organization eventually raised enough money to build a preschool and high school for the town, as well as a library.

Between 2009 and 2010, the drug cartels moved into the town and the Mayor was kidnapped and murdered. By this time, transportation had improved in Guatemala and people began leaving for the U.S. for economic opportunity, leaving their children with relatives in Guatemala and sending back money as they could.

He recalls, "We had never had guns in the region, and I started seeing more guns. I even had to tell people who came into the library to leave who were carrying guns."

In 2011, there was a massacre in the region of 27 farmers by one drug cartel to show another drug cartel they had the power and land in the town. With a limited number of volunteers and declining donations, Peters was forced to close down the nonprofit in 2012. Afterward, he came back to his sister's house on Kent Island. That year, he met with a group at Oasis Covenant Church in Easton, including ChesMRC founders Kevin Rosenthal and Peter Burns, to help get immigrants in the area skilled jobs.

"We started with the school first and developed an afterschool program. I hadn't lived here, so I didn't know anyone. The first person I met at the Back to School Night that year was an immigrant who came from a region in Guatemala. I could tell them all the changes that had occurred since they had left Guatemala. At the end of that night, we had 30 people signed up for the afterschool program," he said.

In 2013 and 2014 the Mid Shore experienced an increase in immigrants from Central America, including Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, due to the violence, corruption, land grabbing, and poverty in their homelands. In 2019, the next surge of immigrants came to the Mid Shore and ChesMRC was seeing five families a week, with only a small percentage from Mexico.

"Violence is the norm in their lives. It has changed people's dreams and has beaten people down. I remember when it was a different place," he comments.

He adds, "Each immigrant story is different. We are here to listen. I think people feel comfortable sharing with me because I am not shocked. I feel blessed to hear these stories so I can help them move forward."

The mission of ChesMRC is to empower people from different cultures to become successful and engaged members of the community. While the organization serves anyone who requests assistance, its primary focus is to help Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals to successfully integrate into the community.

One of ChesMRC's key objectives is to connect this vulnerable population to the existing network of public and private service providers. ChesMRC became a Department of Justice (DOJ) accredited organization in 2016 and can directly assist, without the need for a lawyer, some immigration cases. ChesMRC also became a Certified Application Counselor (CAC) organization and can directly enroll or renew families into Medicaid and health insurance plans.

COURTESY PHOTO



He is beginning to work more with the Pakistani and Haitian communities, visiting Federalsburg once a week to offer services. He adds, "They are now feeling more comfortable coming to me and I can help them navigate. There is no point of judgment."

"We need to educate the community as quickly as possible so that they can learn more about the people coming here — getting to know them and listening to them is very important. Being an immigrant is a unique experience. It's something we can all relate to because it's part of our DNA as Americans."

Matthew points to taking away such labels "undocumented" and "illegal" as they don't point to someone's character and are not a permanent mark on someone's head, adding "We don't know who anyone will be in five years."

"We need to focus on connecting these immigrants to the resources, training, and education to keep them safe, healthy, education and contributing to our communities. It's only going to create a



better world in the end, even if they go back to their communities," he added.

His father, an engineer, influenced his work ethic of learning to do things himself. He comments, "Ambition is service. It has become my daily walk — I am following what I need to do and that is to serve my fellow man."

*Since its inception in September 2012, ChesMRC has provided services to more than 4,000 non-English speakers in Talbot and surrounding counties, involving over 6,500 separate requests for information and referral.* ●

OPPOSITE: Peters in Guatemala in 2001

TOP: Peters, center, reviews a report with Victoria Gomez Lozano and Benjamin Perez Ramos

ABOVE: The Venezuelan flag is a strong emblem of the work being done at ChesMRC.



# DREAM MAN

*Easton's entertainment networker makes a production studio into a success story*

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS

**It all started** with a dream for Santiago Almodovar — a dream to work in the rap music industry. Now, after almost 30 years in the business, Almodovar has started Dreamland Entertainment Group, a studio focused on producing the talent on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

In the early 1990s, 16-year-old Almodovar met rap artist LL Cool J while mixing some tracks with his friends. Soon after, he left his home in New Jersey for New York City, not finishing high school and trying his hand at the music business full time.

“I told my parents — if I don’t do this, I won’t be any good to you because I won’t be any good to myself. You have to let me try.”

Almodovar has always believed in the power of networking and called up LL Cool J when he needed help finding his way after leaving home. Soon after, Almodovar was producing songs for LL Cool J’s artists. While he was supposed to be finishing high school, Almodovar was working in New York with some of the best in the business.

“I got to be a part of something iconic from the beginning. I was a kid, happy to be working with the biggest rap artist in the world.”

Almodovar continued to network and prove his producing skills. He got connected with new artists and started working with A&M Records, where he helped produced the song “The Posse (Shoot Em’ Up)” for the soundtrack of



Santiago Almodovar in his Easton production studio





Recording studio and equipment at Dreamland



the film, “Posse” (1993). This was his big break. Two more of his songs ended up on movie soundtracks — “Street Fighter” (1994) and “Panther” (1995). This led to publishing deals and more top selling songs.

At this point, his “noise turned to music.” At the age of 19, he was able to work full time in the music industry. At this point his parents, and Almodovar himself, realized that his dream had become a reality.

“I was afforded the ability to dream.”

All of this focus paid off for Almodovar. When he was 21, he made the cross-country move to Los Angeles where he worked once again for A&M Records. He

took advantage of more opportunities in the years to come — including meeting and working with his ultimate inspiration, Prince — until he was asked to come back to the East Coast in 2015 help his father after a home fire in New Jersey.

In 2016, Almodovar met his now wife, Doris Chase-Santiago, an Eastern Shore native. When Almodovar and his wife officially moved back to the Eastern Shore in 2018, he created Dreamland Entertainment Group. Dreamland was meant for the community to have a place to come and record. Almodovar liked the landscape of the Eastern Shore for his business, noting that there is “prosperity,

acres of land, fresh air, and nice people.”

“What is there not to love?”

He chose the town of Easton for Dreamland, finding a prime location right on Route 50 between Dover and Goldsborough Streets. Dreamland is a record label and music production studio, as well as a place for artist development, management, song writing, video production, media training and all that encompasses

**Dreamland** was created for the community to have a place to come and record. Santiago liked the landscape of the Eastern Shore for his business noting that there is “prosperity, acres of land, fresh air, and nice people.”

entertainment. Drawing from his 30-year experience and all the amazing people he’s worked with along the way, Almodovar said he is ready to help the Eastern Shore community produce something truly incredible. As one of the very few music studios on the Shore, Dreamland is equipped with all that local talent could want: a main control room that is serene and high tech, where the artist and engineer can

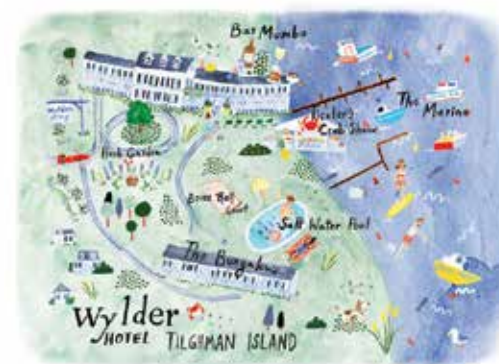
produce their music, and a vocal booth and isolation booth, where the top music equipment is ready for use.

Dreamland is all about making dreams happen for the community, Almodovar says. He wants the space to be community-driven and kid-friendly. Almodovar has big plans for Dreamland and the Eastern Shore and counts himself as very lucky to have the space to make their dreams come true. ☺

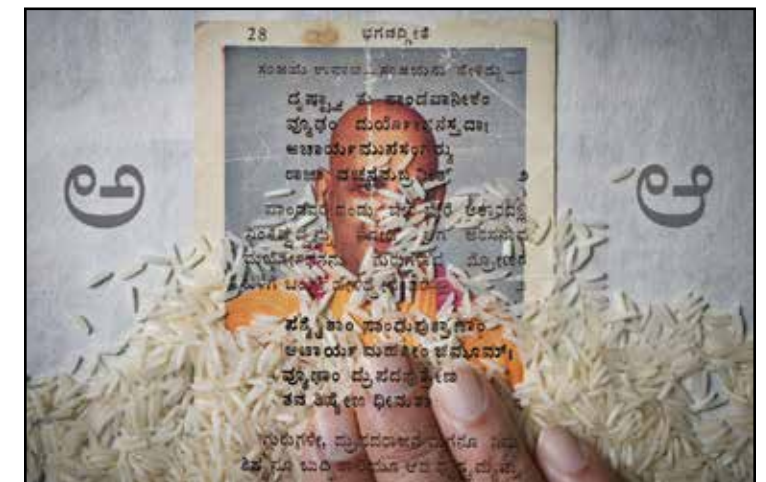
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# THE SHORE’S TERRIFIC TURTLES

*Fear one of the world’s oldest, slowest, self-habiting reptiles? That’s right.*

BY TRACEY F. JOHNS

**No one reveres** “fear the turtle” as much as a loyal Marylander. That “fear” however, has less to do with a turtle and more to do with cheering on the University of Maryland College Park’s “Terps,” or “Terrapins.” Students also honor a bronze diamondback terrapin statue on UMCP’s campus, with legend bringing luck and passing grades to all who rub its snout.

The diamondback terrapin is the state’s official reptile, and one of six families and 19 species of turtles living in Maryland. Box and water turtles make up most of the area’s native species, followed by sea turtles, musk and mud turtles, snapping turtles, and softshell turtles.

Endangered turtles native to the Chesapeake Bay and Eastern Shore include the northern map turtle, Kemp’s Ridley sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, and Atlantic hawksbill sea turtle. Threatened species include the bog turtle, loggerhead sea turtle, and green sea turtle.

“Many people are surprised to learn sea turtles are native to the Bay in summer,” said Phillips Wharf Environmental Center Executive Director and marine biologist Kelley Cox. “People report seeing them as far up as the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, with five native species in the region.”

“The Eastern Shore is a great place to experience a variety of turtles in their

natural land habitats also,” said Cox.

“Especially as the weather warms and they come out of hibernation along creeks, marshes and ditches, and from where they’ve dug in, like mud turtles.”

Turtles are cold-blooded ectotherm reptiles, and their temperature changes according to their environment. “You’ll find them out in the warmest part of the day in the springtime and fall or cooling off in the shade on a hot summer afternoon,” said Cox.

The Eastern Shore offers numerous streams, creeks, and forested areas to see turtles in their natural habitat, including Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, Pickering Creek Audubon Center, Adkins Arboretum, Tuckahoe

PHOTO BY JASON ONDREKA/GETTY IMAGES

State Park, and Pocomoke River State Park, to name a few.

Cox says people can also experience turtles year-round at Phillips Wharf, where they foster and rehabilitate turtles and more with an on-site aquarium and the traveling Fishmobile. The Tilghman Island nonprofit takes various turtles to regional schoolchildren and events to teach about their habitat and the threats and opportunities for protecting them.

“Our Fishmobile helps bring the outdoors to students throughout the region,” said Cox. “We have diamondback terrapin, horseshoe crab, northern pufferfish, lined seahorse, American eel, flounder, snapping turtle, blue crab, spider crab, and more.”

Phillips Wharf released four juvenile diamondback terrapins along Black Walnut Cove on Tilghman Island this past October, with plans for another release this fall.

“Each fall, a nest will be accidentally dug up in a garden for example, and the newly hatched turtles and terrapins roughly the size of a quarter come to us,” said Cox. “Baby turtles are not easy to raise. They often require weekly nebulizer treatments to address respiratory issues until they reach a sustainable size, and we have to monitor and separate the aggressive and passive turtles to give everyone an equal chance of survival.”

Cox says it costs about \$1 per day to raise these hatchlings over the year, with donor support covering most of the expenses.

“And should you find a turtle crossing the road, be safe with oncoming traffic before getting out and helping, and always lift the shell from the back,” said Cox. “It also helps to keep a shovel or strong piece of cardboard in your vehicle to help nudge turtles back to a nearby place. Snapping turtles can swiftly move their heads, so always be careful.”

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**PHOTO BY STEPHEN WALKER**  
A peaceful scene off the jetties in Claiborne

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