

WEST STANLY

THE MAGAZINE

SPRING 2019 EDITION
VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

TRAIL OF WATER

*Rocky River Blueway carries
kayakers into West Stanly*

WEST STANLY PLAYERS

A Deep History of Supporting the Arts

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Cowboy Up with the Saddle Club

PIZZA PIZZAZZ

**EMRICCI'S PIZZERIA DISHES OUT
AWARD-WINNING PIES**

From the Publisher...



Welcome to the very first edition of 'West Stanly - The Magazine'

This quarterly publication, produced by the same people who produce the Stanly News & Press, will highlight the people, places and natural resources that make West Stanly one of the fastest growing vibrant communities in the Central North Carolina.

With growing communities such as Locust and Oakboro, the area is a unique mix of people who have grown up in the area and those who have moved from somewhere else for work or peace and quiet.

Over the next decade, the challenge for the West Stanly area will be to balance the coming growth pushing into the area from Charlotte and Concord while maintaining its own identity and strong sense of community. We are already seeing this in a proposal for almost 300 new homes in Locust.

This first edition of the magazine moves down a dusty trail on horseback with the West Stanly Saddle Club, paddles down the rapids and eddies of the Blueway, grabs an award-winning slice of pizza from Emricci's and settles in to experience some of the culture of the area with the West Stanly Players.

We hope to capture some of the vitality of the area each edition and become a reflection of the best parts of what West Stanly has to offer.

A big thank you goes to our advertisers who are a part of this first edition and will grow with us as we move through the year. We could not produce this product for you without them.

As always, if you have story ideas, we would be happy to hear about them. Please send any questions, comments and ideas to me at roger.watson@stanlynewspress.com.

Thanks for reading. We hope you enjoy the first edition of *West Stanly - The Magazine*.

Sincerely,

Roger Watson
Publisher
Stanly News & Press



PUBLISHER
Roger Watson

EDITOR
BJ Drye

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Tracey Almond

WRITERS
Shannon Beamon
Sylvia Hoffmire
Chris Miller

ADVERTISING STAFF
Anna James
Elizabeth Tucker
Sherry Nance

DISTRIBUTION
Deborah Holt

West Stanly - The Magazine
is a quarterly publication of

The Stanly News & Press

The Stanly News & Press
237 W. North Street
Albemarle, NC 28001
Phone: (704) 982-2121

Editorial contributions should be sent to:
Stanly News & Press
PO Box 488
Albemarle, NC 28002
or emailed to bj.drye@stanlynewspress.com

Address advertising inquiries to
Tracey Almond (704) 982-2121
or tracey.almond@stanlynewspress.com

West Stanly - The Magazine
may be found online at
www.thesnaponline.com



TRAIL OF WATER

Rocky River Blueway Carries
Kayakers Into West Stanly



EMRICCI PIZZERIA

Has Gained National Recognition
After Only a Few Years



SLOWING DOWN BY SADDLING UP

West Stanly Saddle Club
Celebrates 50 Years



WEST STANLY PLAYERS

Students Reap All the Benefits of the Arts
Experience Through Their Theater Program



ABOUT THE COVER

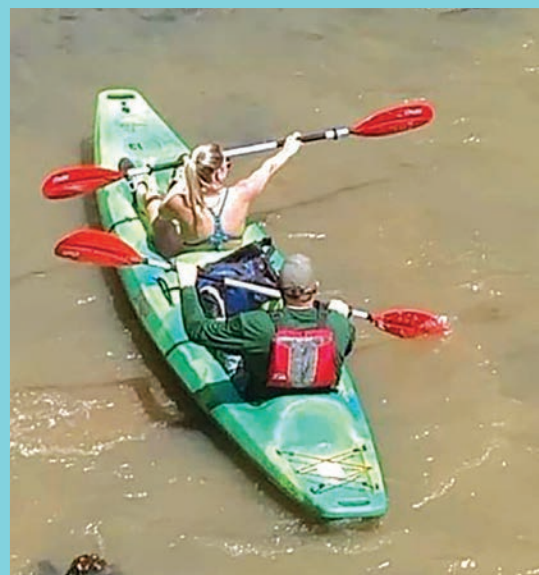
ABOUT THE COVER:

One of the two award-winning pizza varieties at
Emricci's Pizzeria. We hope this has made you hungry.

Rocky River Blueway

Trail of Water

***Rocky River Blueway Carries
Kayakers Into West Stanly***





By Shannon Beamon

On days after it rains, music from a cathedral in the wilderness echoes off the trees along the Rocky River. It resonates with the strum of current on stone, the plinking of water off leaves, the trill of birds ringing in between, while branches stretch like arches overhead and eddies swirl like polished tile below.

“When you go paddling on days like that, it just kind of sinks into you,” said Debbi Musika who operates a kayaking business with Jim Weller out of Oakboro. “So fully peaceful.”

But sometimes the sweetest sanctuaries are also the most elusive. And for a long time, the Rocky River has been no exception.

Considered the longest undammed river in North Carolina, it runs through Charlotte and then winds through the back country of Cabarrus and Stanly counties before joining up with the Yadkin-PeeDee River. While somewhat tamed by the cement banks of the city, it gets a mind of its own as it heads south, creating steep banks and stony beds as it goes.

“You can’t hardly get down there sometimes,” said Darren Russell II, an Albemarle native who grew up fishing on the Rocky River with his dad.

Between that and the private property that dominates the river’s southern end, even locals have a hard time finding a way to the river sanctuary.

“It’s always been a pretty bit of river, but not always user friendly,” added Jeremy Berntino, who operates another kayaking business in Stanly.

However, after five years of effort, that portion of the Rocky River may be opening up to visitors.

Through the Carolina Thread Trail and dozens of affiliates, a Blueway — or kayaking and canoeing trail — now runs along the river from Midland to Norwood. So far six access points have been constructed along the 45-mile section of hidden sanctuary, four along Stanly’s southwest border.

Two of the most recent opened in Oakboro this past summer via a land donation made by Brooks Barnhardt and the Rocky River Organization for Preservation and Protection.

“It’s a wonderful addition to the community,” Musika said.

Consisting of a parking lot, a stairway down to the water, and a wooden ramp to launch a kayak or canoe, each access is open to the public. Paddlers can get down to the water without trespassing on private property.

“It certainly makes getting down here a lot easier than it used to be,” Russell said.



In fact, that accessibility was one of the guiding reasons Musika and Weller opened their kayaking business, River Rooster, last summer.

The two purchased a commercial building in Oakboro a couple years ago, but were at a loss as to how to use it until they heard about the Blueway at a Greater Oakboro Business Association meeting.

“Here were all these great launches but no good way of getting people to them,” Musika said. “We were like, ‘We can help with that.’”

After paddling the Blueway dozens of times themselves, they organized a kayaking rental/shuttle business model utilizing each of the six Blueway launches.

“It was a lot of fun,” Musika said. “Trying out different parts of the river at different water levels to see what worked best.”

Turns out about 1 to 3 feet of flow is ideal for paddling the Rocky, they said. Less than that and paddlers may find themselves walking their kayak more than paddling it. More than that and they may get more rapids than they bargained for.

“That’s the thing about an undammed river,” Musika said. “You’re completely dependent on mother nature... we wanted to find out what worked so we could help other people have a good time.”



CAROLINA BARBEQUE COMPANY

CAROLINA BARBEQUE COMPANY SPECIALIZES IN SLOW SMOKED PULLED PORK, CHICKEN, BRISKET, RIBS AND HOMEMADE DESSERTS.

10% off

purchase of \$10 or more
(excluding alcohol)

EXPIRES 06/30/19

101 N. Central Ave.
Locust, NC
(704) 888-2022

Hours: Mon. - Sat. 11 AM to 8 PM
Sunday Closed

www.carolinabarbequecompany.com

**DINE IN • TAKE OUT
DRIVE THROUGH • CATERING AVAILABLE**

“The food is delicious and the customer service is great!! So glad to finally have a good BBQ restaurant in town!”

~ Satisfied Customer



Like us on Facebook

Facebook page www.facebook.com/travelinplg/



BROWN, BROWN & BROWN ATTORNEYS

**Offices in Locust
and Albemarle**

Please call: 704-781-0175
or 704-982-2141
for an appointment
brownlaw@windstream.net

**Charles P. Brown
Connie E. Josey
James L. Senter**

*Members of this firm and
their predecessors have
served Stanly County and the
surrounding area since 1878.*

In addition, they post a link to flow levels on their website, so paddlers can check for themselves, as well.

“We’re just trying to do anything that’ll facilitate people getting out there,” Musika said.

So far, that seems to be paying off. During their first year, River Rooster had both locals and visitors come through their doors, some renting kayaks, some simply looking for someone to shuttle them to a launch.

“I’d say about half were local, half came from somewhere else,” Musika said. “I think it’s got a lot of potential.”

Fellow kayaking business owner, Bertino, agreed. He opened his business last year as well, focusing his efforts on Badin Lake, Falls Reservoir, and the Uwharrie River. But now he’s thinking about branching out to the Rocky River as well.

“Last year we had a number of people — particularly some special forces guys — asking about our roughest ride,” Bertino said. “Some people are looking for something a little more wild... (the Blueway) adds that variety. A little something different.”

In fact, with several class-one rapids and a couple class two, the Rocky River is a great introduction to river paddling, Musika noted.



SOMETIMES, MAKING A DIFFERENCE IS ABOUT BEING RIGHT HERE.

As a local bank, we see people improving this community every day. It could be starting a business, growing a family, serving others, helping someone in need. For us, we set out to make a difference by being right here to support you on your journey.

uwharrie.com
800.438.6864



Member FDIC

**Uwharrie
BANK**

"If you're used to lakes, it's a great transition," Musika said. "I think my favorite stretch is between the two Oakboro launches. You go through one little rapid, it's calm for a moment, and then you hear a sound. The next rapid... It continues like that for a good while. Rapid, calm, rapid, calm."

However, the other sections of the river have their advantages as well. The northern part of the river is a bit more sandy and gentle. The southern section is deeper and smoother. Trips also vary in length, anywhere from two to nine hours.

"It's just about what you're looking for," Musika said. In the future there may be even more options for paddlers, as well.

As many as 13 accesses were proposed when CTT first presented plans for the Rocky River Blueway back in 2015, so other launches are in the works. In fact, the town of Stanfield donated land to the Catawba Land Conservancy - which spearheads CTT - a couple of years ago with hopes of seeing the next Blueway launch there.

"The Rocky River has always been a great resource and this is giving people a way to get to it," Bertino said. "I think that is what could make a difference."

After all, what is a thrumming current, the drip of water, the lap of eddies without an audience to enjoy it?

"We're so excited to share that with someone else," Musika said.





Beyond the Banks

It's not just a kayaking trail being forged along the Rocky River these days. Other groups are hammering out land preservation agreements along the waterway, as well.

"The Rocky River is an important natural resource for biodiversity protection, farmland conservation as well as recreation in our region," said Crystal Cockman, the Conservation Director for the Three Rivers Land Trust. "There are many unique natural communities and rare plants associated with this stream corridor. There are also great farmland soils along the river."

So far the Three Rivers Land Trust has helped facilitate the preservation more than 2,000 acres of land along the Rocky River, many through the help of local families (such as the Leon Huneycutt Farm, the Coble Farm and the Barry E. McSwain Farm).

Other groups such as the Plant Preservation Program and the Rocky River Organization for Preservation and Protection have also purchased land along the river to reserve as parks.

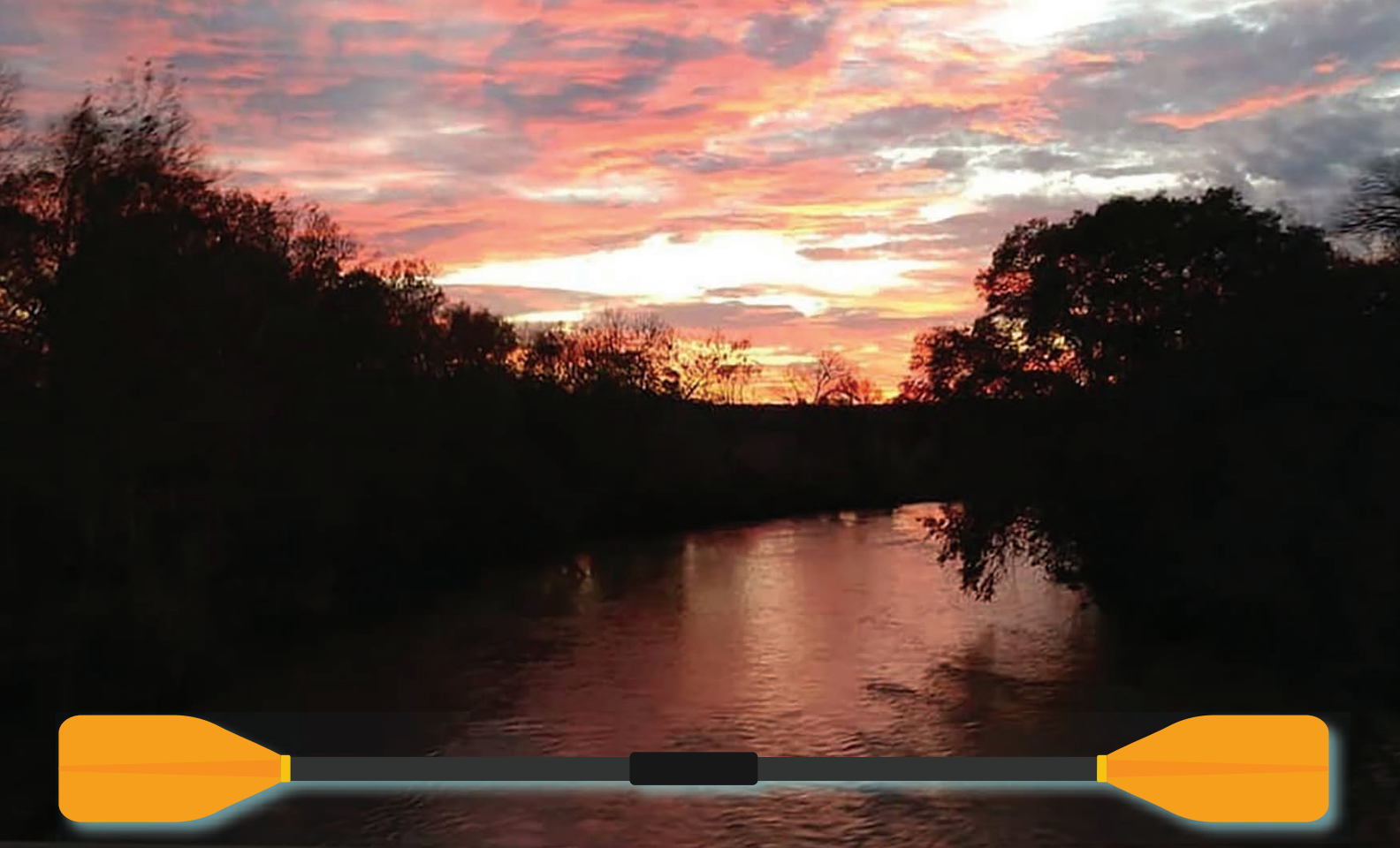
"I think one of the things people love about the Rocky River is that it is so undeveloped," said Debbi Musika of River Rooster. "And people want to keep it that way."

Change Your Life!



Degrees * Diplomas * Certificates

stanly *SCC*
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
www.stanly.edu



Rocky River Blueway Launches

Pharr Family Preserve

The uppermost launch of the Rocky River Blueway, this access feeds into a gentle section of the river. There are large sections of sandy riverbed along this portion of the river, interspersed with smaller stones and a few rapids. Sandy stretches may need to be walked when water levels are low.

Difficulty: Easy

Distance to next stop: 4 miles (about a 2-hour paddle)

Launch description: Wood ramp about a quarter mile's walk from the parking lot

Location: 9111 Mt. Pleasant Road South, Midland, NC

Riverbend Farms

About 18 miles upstream from the Blueway launch, this site is mostly used as a take-out point for those coming from Pharr Family Preserve. Those attempting to launch from there should give themselves at least nine hours to reach the next stop.

Difficulty: Moderate-Hard

Distance to next stop: 18 miles (about a nine-hour paddle)

Launch: Wood ramp a few hundred feet downhill from the parking lot

Location: 12150 McManus Road, Midland, NC

Summer Concert Series



April 13: Valhalla Band*

May 18: Deeper Shade of Blue

June 15: The Carolina Breakers

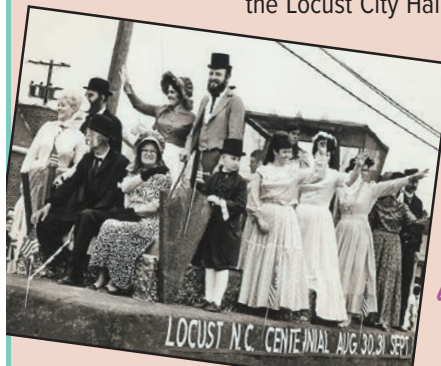
July 20: Eaglewing

August 17: Right Turn Clyde

September 21: The Tams



Locust's Summer Concert Series are free, live musical events held from April to September. For nine years, the community of Locust and surrounding areas have enjoyed the Concert Series in Locust's nostalgic Town Center. Concert nights feature bands from different genres including country, beach music, bluegrass, folk, and today's popular hits. The 2.5 acre lawn in the back yard of the Locust City Hall is the perfect venue for our Summer Concert Series.



We always close our concert finale with a fireworks show! You won't want to miss it!

Locust, celebrating 150 years

Oakboro I

The first of the two newest Blueway launches, this site features a park as well as a launch. The following section of river features frequent class one rapids as well as a couple bordering on class two, with short, calm breaks between rapids.

Difficulty: Moderate

Distance to next stop: 7 miles (about a three-hour paddle)

Launch: Wood ramp a few hundred feet from parking lot

Location: 7801 NC-205, Marshville, NC

Oakboro II

The second of the two newest Blueway launches, this site actually sits on Long Creek (which empties into the Rocky River). Those coming from Oakboro I will need to paddle about a third mile up Long Creek to take out. Conditions much the same as Oakboro I.

Difficulty: Moderate

Distance to next stop: 10 miles (about a 4.5-hour paddle)

Launch: Wood ramp nearly adjacent to parking lot

Plank Road

This access feeds into a section of the waterway that lives up to its name. Peppered with larger stones, it features several class one rapids. The river also starts to get deeper here, reducing the need to walk or push a craft through shallows.

Difficulty: Moderate

Craft: Kayaks and canoes

Launch: Wood ramp adjacent to parking lot going straight into the water

Location: 137 Plank Road, Wadesboro

Distance to Next Launch: 5.5 miles (about a three-hour paddle)

Norwood at Riverview Road

This launch is technically the end of the CTT Blueway. However, if paddlers wish to continue, they can follow the Rocky River downstream to a take-out at the Pee Dee Wildlife Refuge. About halfway into the journey the Rocky River will merge with the Yadkin-Pee Dee, becoming a much wider and deeper waterway with few obstructions.

Difficulty: Easy-Moderate

Distance to Next Launch: 7.6 miles (about a four-hour paddle)

Launch: Wood ramp going down to the riverbank, then an unpaved path to the water

Location: Riverview Road in Norwood about 100 feet west of its intersection with U.S. Highway 52



Other Launches Downstream of Stanley

Pee Dee Wildlife Refuge - Griffin Road off of Grassy Island Road. (7.6 miles downstream of Norwood)

Red Hill - SR 1671, Wadesboro
(11.2 miles downstream of Norwood)

Blewett Falls - SR 1759, Lilesville
(27 miles downstream of Norwood) ■



Champions for prosperity • 704.982.8116 • stanlychamber.org

**DEESE
ELECTRIC**
HEATING & COOLING
Serving Stanly County & Surrounding Areas Since 1966

Thank you
for voting us
Best Electrician in
Stanly County!

**ELECTRICAL
RESIDENTIAL
COMMERCIAL**

704-982-4276
1928 US-52, Albemarle, NC 28001

Special
financing
available on
new systems!

A photograph of a family (a man, a woman, and two children) sitting on a white couch in a living room, looking at a laptop.

Call Us for All of Your Heating, Cooling & Electrical Needs!

The logo for Chambers Engineering, PA, featuring a stylized red and white geometric shape next to the text "chambers engineering, pa".

129 North First Street • Albemarle, NC
704.984.6427 • www.ce-pa.com



EMRICCI

PIZZERIA

By Chris Miller

Emricci Pizzeria has only been in Locust for only a few years, but it has already gained national recognition for its award-winning pizzas.

Co-owners Dave Emrich and Jason Wright originally bought the building in 2014, when it was still Anzi Pizza and Pasta. They were looking for an independent restaurant in a good location and found that with Anzi.

Emrich, who is originally from Philadelphia, has been in the restaurant business since 1993. Before Emricci's, Emrich and Wright owned two Jersey Mike's sandwich shops in the Charlotte area.

"We had the idea that we would get here and we would work on developing our own restaurant," said Emrich.

Once they bought the restaurant, "we began learning everything we could about how to make great pizzas," he said.

"We weren't doing anything the way Anzi did," Emrich said. "We tore everything down to the ingredients and rethought everything like the processes, the ingredients, on how we can make the best possible pizza."

Emrich and Wright kept the Anzi name for a while, but in 2015, they had a contest for the community to help find a new name. People voted by putting a dollar into jars for names they approved of. The money went to charity and the winning name was Emricci, a variation on Emrich's last name.

The other advantage of having a made up name was Emrich and Wright could easily get web properties for Emricci.com.

On a busy day, Emricci's often makes more than 100 pizzas, Wright said.

They fold the dough into balls and then flatten them to try and get any excess air out. They then oil the dough and rise it in the cooler for three days. "That gives the yeast

and the malt a chance to dance together and really develop some flavor and texture," Wright said.

Once the dough has been sauced and the toppings have been placed, it goes into a huge oven for about seven minutes, Wright said. When it's ready, the pizza dough expands and the yeast creates a light, airy crust.

Starting in 2015, Emrich and Wright went to Pizza Expo, a giant pizza show in Las Vegas.

At the expo, they took numerous pizza-making seminars, including how to make great pizza sauce and great dough. "It's like going to graduate school for pizza," Emrich said.

"We've been working very hard trying to learn from experts about how to make the best pizza we possibly can," Emrich said.

In 2016, Emricci entered into the International Pizza Challenge, which is part of the Las Vegas Pizza Expo.

"We thought we were making a really great pizza and we were learning as much as we could," Emrich said, "and we just wanted to test ourselves against the best in the world."





The restaurant was entered into the traditional division (pizzas must have only two toppings) and, to the surprise of both Emrich and Wright, Emricci Pizzeria took home the bronze medal for the Southeast region.

"I didn't expect much" during the first competition, Emrich said, "but I just thought, you know let's compete and if we don't do well this year we'll try again next year."



The winning pizza had sliced, season ham with banana peppers. Emrich made the pizza, so on the menu, it's called "The Dave."

Chefs from all over the world enter the challenge each year, Emrich said.

They entered the International Pizza Challenge again in 2018 and did even better, winning a silver medal in the traditional division for the Southeast region.



The winning pizza had sweet Italian sausage and spicy peppadew peppers. Wright made the pizza, so on the menu, it's called "The Jason."



Emricci's is the only pizza restaurant in the area that uses peppadew peppers. The peppers are imported from South Africa, Emrich said.

The International Pizza Challenge took place in early March and though Emricci's didn't place in the competition this year, Emrich said the competition was still important.

"Even if we don't win the competition," he said, "there's always things we can learn."

Emrich and Wright plan to enter the pizza challenge each year and their goal is to eventually win the gold medal.

Emricci also cares about its community.

The second Tuesday of each month is Community Day, where the restaurant donates 10 percent of its sales to local non-profits and school groups. If the sales reach over 1,000, Emricci's will donate 20 percent of the total sales.



Some of the groups that have received donations include the Rotary Club of West Stanly, Locust Elementary, Carolina Christian School, American Legion 433 and the West Stanly Senior Center.

In 2018, Emricci's held 63 Community Days and gave back more than \$9,500 to local groups and non-profits.

"We do everything we can to try to be an asset to the community here," Emrich said. "We really do love Locust."

And the people love Emricci's.

Mike Scarborough comes for lunch at least once a week every day. The Oakboro resident has been coming to Emricci's since the restaurant first opened.

"There's no other Italian restaurants in this area," he said.

Scarborough enjoys the restaurant's pasta, especially their baked ziti.

Mary and Steve Sycuro of Locust both come to Emricci's one to two times a week.

"They make the best Greek salad around," Mary said.

She likes to try the specialty pizzas because they're more interesting than standard pepperoni or cheese pizzas, she said. She really likes The Dave specialty pizza.

Steve likes the Pesto Bianco, a white basil pesto pizza mixed with ricotta and mozzarella cheese and diced tomatoes.

"It's very close to New York-style pizza," Steve said. And he and Mary should know, since they are originally from Brooklyn.

"They do so much for the community," Steve said, who is also the secretary of the Rotary Club of West Stanly. Every third Tuesday a month, the restaurant donates 10 percent to the Rotary Club.

"One of the cool things about being in a small town is our ability to connect with people and local organizations we give back to," Emrich said. "When we're doing a good job and making a good product, people are really appreciative of it, so we're very thankful for that too." ■

**Second Tuesday
of each month is
Community Day!**

**10% of sales go to local
non-profits and schools!**

*Paddle the Rocky River
Blueway!*

Follow us!  

Centrally located
in Oakboro, NC

 *River
Rooster*

Kayak
Rentals Shuttle
Service

www.RiverRoosterLLC.com
704-781-7454

FREE BEVERAGE
one per order, excludes weekly specials. Exp 12/31/19

 *Los Jacubes*

FAMILY MEXICAN RESTAURANT
213 North Main St., Oakboro
704-485-2244

**Bullington
Construction, Inc.**
DBE/WBE

Guardrail - Cable Guiderail
Fencing

164 American Drive, Oakboro
704-486-0379
www.bullingtonconstruction.com

ROTATION STATION

**Antiques, Collectibles,
Household Goods,
Clothing, Books,
Furniture, Appliances**

Open Tues - Fri 10am - 7pm
Sat 8am - 5pm

**421 N Main St.
Oakboro NC
704-485-5957**

An additional
10% OFF
your purchase!

(Must present coupon. One use only. Coupon
does not apply to items on consignment.)

**Hospice isn't
just about dying
peacefully.**



**It's about living
until you die.**



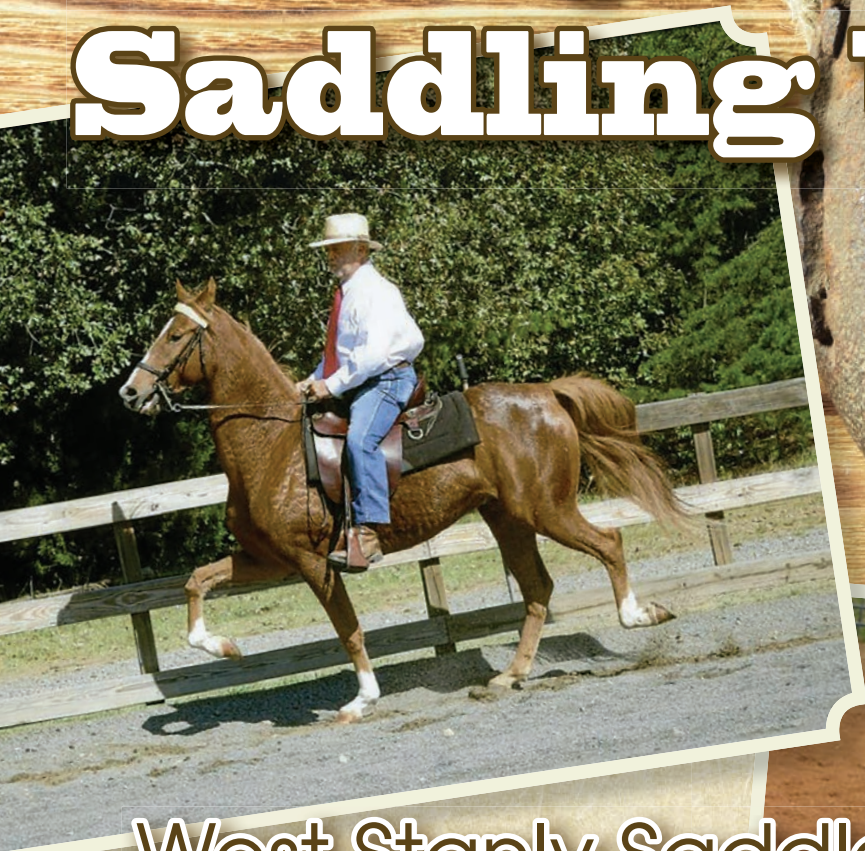
960 North First Street
Albemarle, NC

704-983-4216
hospiceofstanly.org

Oakboro

Slowing Down by Saddling Up

By Shannon Beamon



West Stanly Saddle Club
Celebrates
50 YEARS
of Living Life
in the 'Slow Lane'



In Doug Little's opinion, highways aren't everything they're cracked up to be. Fast, yes. Convenient, yes. But precious little else.

"Life's just all around better when you slow down," he said.

Perhaps that's why he and about a dozen other men first started riding horses together back in 1968. Not because they were opposed to speed or anything — they liked fast cars as much as the next guy — but sometimes stepping out of the fast lane, both literally and figuratively, felt really good.

"Maybe it's the way we grew up," Little said. "A lot of the work was done with horses and donkeys when we were little... that kind of pace, it gets in your blood."

But whether it's nostalgia or escape that got them started, they haven't stopped riding since.

Fifty years later, they still take their horses out together. In fact, their weekend rides have transformed into a 50-year-old, multi-generational tradition known as the West Stanly Saddle Club.

Over the years, dozens of members have come through the club, including the 12 to 15 that are members now. Together they operate about 13.5 acres and a clubhouse in the Big Lick area. Even the road back there is named after them now: "Saddle Club Road."

"I don't think any of us ever pictured that when we started," Little said.

But as it turns out there are plenty of other people who like to slow down with a quiet ride, too. While originally, there were about a dozen in their riding group, they soon gained a dozen more. Then another. And another.

"We're not talking professionals here, these are just back yard horses, people who just like to get away for a bit," Little said. "Eventually we had more than we could take along the big roads."

They kept to dirt roads and old trails alone, winding between houses and farmland.

But over time, more and more of those dirt roads got paved over to make way for the faster traffic.

"There really aren't many dirt roads left now," Little said.

But as unfortunate as that was, the dwindling dirt roads may have helped the club officially band together. In order to keep riding on the weekends, Little explained. The group decided to start renting a 100-acre property belonging to someone they knew.

Somewhere in that process they officially adopted the name "West Stanly Saddle Club."

"It gave us something to work on together, too," Little said, noting that both the property and a little farm house on it were overgrown. As a group, members worked to fix up and remodel the house and then started hosting dinners to raise money for the club.

"Members would eat dinner around 2 p.m. and then ride the afternoon with their children," an historical account of the club reads. "A band would set up on top of a 40-foot tractor trailer bed and play for people dancing in sawdust beneath the stars."

Eventually the benefits of having such a space for their growing community spurred the club to purchase a property of their own for the group to permanently use.

"And that's where we are today," Little said.

However, it's not just property they've taken on over the years. The West Stanly Saddle Club has taken on a number of other traditions that "slow life down," too.





WANT TO CHECK IT OUT?

Any capable rider can be voted in as a member of the West Stanly Saddle Club. After an interested party has attended two club meetings, current members vote on their request. Membership extends to spouses and children.

The club meets monthly at their property on Saddle Club Road. Members must provide their own horses and equipment at all events. To find out more about the club call (704) 791-0498 or email weststanlysaddleclub@gmail.com.

The club meets at 7 p.m. the first Saturday of every month at their clubhouse, 13154 Saddle Club Rd., Oakboro.

For a while that was through square dances that literally gave people dancing to a different tempo. Later, they also began hosting horse shows and turkey shoots as a way to give families a break from their busy lives.

But perhaps the most distinctive tradition the club adopted is also one of their oldest.

It all started when the club was very young, Little explained. Through unexpected circumstances met a kindred spirit named Tom Hudson. Like Little, Hudson grew up on a farm and had a bunch of old farming equipment.

Including wagons. Lots of wagons.

"So he fixed those things up and began leading wagon trains out in Aquadale," Little said. "Teams of horses pulling wagons across the country. They'd start at Rocky River Fish House and continue on for miles from there."

Smitten with the idea, Little and the rest of the West Stanly Saddle Club began fixing up wagons and hosting wagon trains as well.

"At one point we had as many as 40 to 50 wagons and 300 to 400 heads of horses coming out," Little said.

Not as many people have the antique wagons now, he noted, but the club continues to host a couple of wagon trains each year. Their next one will start April 12.

"It's a whole weekend affair," Little said.

After leaving the clubhouse, he detailed, they make their way along back roads and across farmland till they get about halfway through the day. Then they'll stop by a stream or in a stand of trees to eat lunch and cool off before heading back and spending the night at the clubhouse.

"Then the next day we do it again," Little said.

Perhaps the best part is seeing people visibly relax, he noted. Whether it's the blue of the sky, the slow grind of wagon wheels, or the antics of the younger riders who prefer riding horseback to riding in wagons, there's something in the air that won't let people feel harried for long.

"Sometimes you've got horses running away from people, or someone falling into the water, or someone sliding off their horse," Little said. "It makes for a lot of memories and a lot of fun."

But whether he's in the wagon train with others or on a solitary evening ride by himself, Little said there are few things that can slow the rush of life down like that.

"I guess when you mess with horses and ride horses and love horses, you want to find a way to get out and be with them," Little said. "Like I said, it just gets in your blood." ■



Beane Swaringen & Company, PLLC

Certified Public Accountants

CYNTHIA H. BEANE, CPA • S. TODD SWARINGEN, CPA
SANDRA K. GANN, CPA • JULIE W. MOXLEY, CPA

960 Shankle St.
Albemarle, NC 28002
704-982-0126
Fax: 704-982-1104

236 Market St., Suite 130
Locust, NC 28097
704-888-6884
Fax: 704-888-6998

0870126931

Proudly serving Excellence to the Stanly County Community since 2000!

- Marketing Collateral
- Signs and Displays
- Monuments
- Street Signs
- Cluster Mailboxes



704-888-8870 • Graphi-Cal.com

Address: 106 Conveyor Beltway • Stanfield, NC 28163
Mailing: PO Box 850, Locust, NC 28097



WEST STANLY SADDLE CLUB'S UPCOMING EVENTS

Wagon Train

5 p.m. April 12 - 5 p.m. April 14

The West Stanly Saddle Club Clubhouse

Both riders and wagoneers will gather Friday evening and then head out on both Saturday and Sunday for a trip around the countryside.

Easter Egg Hunt

10 a.m. April 20

West Stanly Saddle Club Clubhouse

Families are invited to come out for games such as a balloon pop, egg and spoon relay, hopping relay, sack race and stick horse race. Games are \$1 a piece. An Easter egg hunt will follow. All age groups welcome.

We
are your
SOLUTION
to Home Improvements & Renovations.



**GREAT PRICES &
EXPERT INSTALLATION!**

- Cabinet
- Vinyl Flooring
- Building
- Plumbing
- Roofing Shingles
- Home Improvements
- Prefinished Hardwood Flooring

Albemarle
Home Solutions

1917 E. Main St., Albemarle, NC
BESIDE BLUE BAY ACROSS FROM ALDI
(704) 985-1080

STANLY APPLIANCE

- All Major Appliance Parts Available
- Custom Ordering Available
- Certified Warranty Work for Whirlpool & KitchenAid Appliances

Whirlpool & KitchenAid
Appliances Available!



1467 N. First St./US 52 N • Albemarle, NC
704-983-2111

West Stanly High School

WEST STANLY

PLAYERS

By Sylvia Hoffmire





Students at West Stanly High School reap all the benefits of the arts experience through their theater program under the guidance of Wes Tucker, the only certified theater teacher in Stanly County.

The crown jewel of the robust program is the West Stanly Players who stage productions in the theater at West Stanly High School twice a year and participate in a variety of performance opportunities throughout the county in the spirit of community outreach.

West Stanly High School has a deep history of supporting the dramatic arts.

In 1963, the senior class presented *Jane Eyre*, directed by Judy Coble who later became Judy Coble Tucker, mother of Wes Tucker. Without a formal theater program, various clubs took turns mounting ambitious productions such as *Oklahoma*, *South Pacific*, and *Carousel* among others. In 1970, the principal initiated a theater class and hired James D. Kennedy, a struggling actor and former resident of Stanly County, to teach the class and develop a drama club. West Stanly Players, created by Kennedy, staged *Flowers for Algernon* as their first production under his direction.

Tucker studied theater with Kennedy and was an active member of West Stanly Players, graduating in 1991. When Kennedy retired in 1997, Tucker was recruited to take his place and now, 22 years later, continues to develop and expand the program. In 1970, one theater class was included in the curriculum. Today there are four: beginning, intermediate, proficient (which includes honors) and advanced. It's possible for a student to take a theater class every semester.

“

“The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively.”

— Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, 2009-15

”

The popular program attracts interest from many people, notable among them, Bob Inman, former television newscaster and now prolific writer. When Inman decided to write a play which he titled "The Drama Club," he reached out to Tucker for help. Over the space of several months, Inman shadowed Tucker as he taught classes, met with students, and rehearsed plays in order to write a fully authentic script. Apparently, Inman succeeded in capturing the drama club experience because Tucker says when he saw the play, "It was like the words were coming out of my mouth." Inman's play was published by Dramatic Publishing and has been performed throughout the United States.

West Stanly Players mount two full scale productions a year in the fall and the spring. Every other year the spring production is a musical and in alternate years is a drama. Tucker said that some of the plays he's considering for the Spring 2019 production include *The Greatest Gatsby*, *Our Town*, and *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*.

When Tucker graduated from UNC-

Charlotte, he says he had made three very definite decisions about his life: 1) he wasn't going to teach, 2) he wasn't coming back to Stanly County, 3) he would stay in Charlotte or somewhere beyond. He laughs now when looking back on those intentions and says, "God has a way of putting you where you're supposed to be." Twenty-two years later, upwards of fifty productions, and meaningful interaction with more than one thousand students find Tucker continuing to be engaged and energized by his work and his commitment to the benefits of the theater program at West Stanly High School.

"I enjoy what I do—I love the kids and love my program." He reflects on the benefits of involvement in theater classes and productions. "Theater has the power [for you] to find out who you are," he says and gestures to embrace the stage and the rows of seats behind him. "In this room it's a little bit of everything. Theater creates a family relationship where there are no boundaries."

Tucker strives to provide his students with a broad range of experiences that take them

beyond the classroom and theater creating opportunities for "as much community involvement as we can." In his own life and work, he effectively models active community involvement through lifelong service to Stanly County in a variety of roles. Tucker served on the Arts Council Board for seven years, three as Chairman; Friends of the Agri-Civic Center Board; Board of Directors for the Miss Stanly County Scholarship Pageant; produces, along with the Arts Council, a two-week summer Arts Camp for ages 6-12 that encompasses theater, dance, visual art, and music. In addition to all of that, he hosts community events such as Dancing with the Stars that benefits Butterfly House and Relay for Life events, and as well as the Fourth of July Celebration. In 2013 he initiated a middle school drama program open to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.

As a result of Tucker's wide-ranging involvement with the community, the West Stanly Players participate in "as much community outreach as schedules permit." In the fall of 2018, for instance, they partnered with the West Stanly Senior Center to produce a murder mystery dinner

Engaged Seniors=Healthy Seniors

West Stanly Senior Center offers a variety of exercise, educational, social, and spiritual opportunities.

Monday-Friday from 10 am to 4 pm
We look forward to meeting you!

We are located at
213 Town Center Dr, Locust

For more information, please
contact us at 980-354-8056 or
wssc@stanlyymca.org



Award Winning Pizza in Locust!



EMRICCI
PIZZERIA

We Cater!

1814 Main St. W. , Locust, NC
www.emricci.com • 704-781-0065 • i

HARTSELL FUNERAL HOME & CREMATION

We've had a
crematory for
over 15 years, but
we're still a funeral
Home, where
family is the heart
and soul.



***Coburn, Louisa, Jeff, Jane
and Miller Hartsell***



522 N. 2nd St. Albemarle, NC 28001
704-983-1188 • www.hartsellfh.com

Concord • 704-786-1161 Harrisburg • 704-247-1722 Midland • 704-888-5571



“Theater has the power [for you] to find out who you are...” “In this room it’s a little bit of everything. Theater creates a family relationship where there are no boundaries.”

— Wes Tucker, certified theater teacher

theater. Three performances were scheduled before Thanksgiving and three after. More recently, they performed scenes from *Odd Couple* and *Steel Magnolias* as part of Arts Day at the Agri-Civic Center on Feb.16.

The theater at West Stanly High School where the Players perform provides excellent physical and technical support. When graduation ceremonies were moved to the Agri-Civic Center, the theater program undertook a renovation of the original stage. A thrust stage was built to extend over multi-level risers increasing the acting area considerably. Up to date lighting and a well-equipped sound and light booth offer members of the organization opportunities to hone their skills in technical theater as well as performance. Sets are designed by West Stanly Players alum, Charles Johnson who is a Professor of Scenic Design at Elon University.

Across the country, alumni of the Players are working onstage and backstage, in front of the camera and behind the camera, as teachers of theater education, and Tucker maintains a connection with all of them. “I tell my students,” he says, “that I live vicariously through them.” Students in the program each year number between 40 and 50 representing all aspects of the school’s population.

Involvement in the arts, particularly collaborative arts such as theater, offers tremendous opportunities for skills development beyond the immediacy of performing. The related careers many members of West Stanly Players have entered beyond high school and college testify to the value of their experiences in theater as part of their secondary education. More impressive is the fact that most of them stay in touch, allowing Tucker as he said to live vicariously through them, but more importantly underlines the familial connections he fostered among them as members of the drama club. ■

FIRST BANK

North Carolina's Community Bank Since 1935

PERSONAL BANKING

MORTGAGE

BUSINESS BANKING

WEALTH & TRUST*

LENDING

INSURANCE*

To learn more, visit

LOCALFIRSTBANK.COM

ALBEMARLE 1910 EAST MAIN STREET

ALBEMARLE 2317 HWY 52 NORTH

RICHFIELD 135 HWY 49 NORTH

LOCUST 114 WEST MAIN STREET

First Bank NMLS ID 474504. Equal Housing Lender. Member FDIC.

*Securities and insurance products are offered through INFINEX INVESTMENTS INC., Member FINRA/SIPC. INFINEX INVESTMENTS INC. and FB Wealth Management, a division of First Bank, are affiliated entities. Investment and Insurance Products are:

Not FDIC Insured	Not Bank Guaranteed	May Lose Value
Not Guaranteed by any Government Agency	Not a Bank Deposit	



Atrium Health

The Care You Demand In West Stanly



Internal Medicine/Family Medicine

Cabarrus Family Medicine -
Locust

123 Professional Park Drive
Locust, NC 28097
704-403-6760

Oakboro Medical Services

112 East First St.
Oakboro, NC 28129
980-323-5240

Imaging

West Stanly Imaging

103 Stanly Parkway, Suite E
Locust, NC 28097
980-323-7000

Orthopedics

Albermarle Orthopedics & Sports
Medicine - Locust

123 Professional Park Drive
Locust, NC 28097
980-323-5425

Atrium Health is dedicated to providing exceptional care
for you and your family close to home.

WHERE DREAMS ARE BORN

YOUR SOURCE OF POWER. AND INFORMATION.

We empower future generations, making sure they have
power to grow and flourish, right here in your hometown.

**UnionPower
Cooperative**
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative