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Sandy Huneycutt (CNA) – 5 years, (Beautician) – 43 years; Christine Benjamin (Housekeeping/Dietary) – 9 years;
Back Row: Samantha Jones (Housekeeping/Dietary) – 3 years; Lashica Johnson (Activity Director, Med Tech) – 11 years;
Rev. Lowell Brown (Chaplain) – 17 years, Laura Curcio (CNA/Med Tech) – 22 years.

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By Charles Curcio

A long-time destination for a wide range of activities, from picnics and birthday parties to hiking and canoeing, moves into its 82nd year of serving the public. Mountain State Park, about five miles from the Albemarle city limits, has offered recreation opportunities for Stanly residents and tourists outside the county borders for nearly a century.

The third oldest state park in the state behind Mount Mitchell and Fort Macon, Morrow Mountain was the first state park in the middle of the state.

Like other state parks, admission is free. Many of the services are available at modest rates.

Morrow Mountain contributes in a number of ways to the local economy, according to Stanly County Economic Development Commission Director Candice Lowder.

"The park has served as an anchor for our tourism cluster that has been expanding for several decades. This cluster of outdoor recreational venues attracts visitors from all over the region, state and nation, offering a variety of outdoor opportunities for visitors of all ages," Lowder said.

"Park visitors and staff patronize our local restaurants, retail stores, gas stations and hotels, which benefits the local economy by supporting our small businesses and generating additional tax revenue."

Lowder said the park also is "a high-quality

Photos Contributed by Michael Lanier with My Different Perspective

park with recreational and educational opportunities for our citizens that is easily accessible for all and contributes to the high quality of life our residents continue to enjoy."

Chris Lambert, director of the Stanly County Convention & Visitors Bureau, called Morrow Mountain State Park "an economic generator" for the county, even without the visitors.

"Take the visitors out of the equation and the park itself (still) generates an economic impact of around \$500,000. Park staff are our neighbors and friends that spend money daily in Stanly County, along with supplies that are purchased for the park locally," Lambert said.

"We appreciate everything that Morrow Mountain does and are proud of the job that the staff does and the amenities that are provided to us by this beautiful area."

HISTORY

Development of the state park began in the 1920s from James McKnight Morrow and other citizens, including A.C. Huneycutt, the publisher of the Stanly News & Press (SNAP), but the Great Depression slowed the project.

Published reports in the early 1930s showed interest in the state park was renewed with land donations coming from Morrow. In 1935, L.A.



Sharpe, inspector of the state's Division of State Parks, traveled to Stanly to inspect the property proposed for the park, around 2,000 acres of land.

Morrow eventually sold the mountain area and 1,100 acres to the state for a park for \$5,000, with the deeds being recorded in June 1935. Those deeds totaled up to 2,500 acres along with donations from other landowners such as E.E. Snuggs, J.A. Groves, Mrs. G.R. McCain, A.F. and E.C. Biles, E.P. and Pantha Clodfelter, Will and Paul Kirk and Stanly Lumber Company, according to published SNAP articles.

The Civilian Conservation Corps then took seven years to develop the park as approximately 400 workers lived in the camp while working. Park goers actually started entering the park in 1939 as other projects were being completed. The official grand opening of the park came in the summer of 1940.

NOW

Morrow Mountain now has 4,742 acres of land and includes part of the Yadkin-Pee Dee River and Lake Tillery, which opens up the possibilities of watersports for residents and tourists alike. Canoes and kayaks are available for rental during the year while a boat launch awaits fishing aficionados and those wanting a day on their boat on the lake.

People wanting to cool off from a hot Stanly summer day can do so in the swimming pool built by the CCC and the Works Progress Administration, which still welcomes young and old swimmers in the summer months.

The recreational opportunities in the park do not begin and end at the water's edge or poolside. More than 20 miles of walking and hiking trails are available, ranging in difficulty and length for people of every age and fitness level.

Camping, always a big part of Morrow Mountain State Park, continues with 106 family campsites and six cabins.

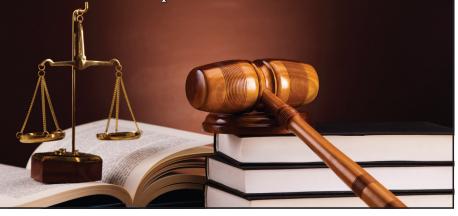
History buffs can look back into the past at the preserved house of Dr. Francis Kron sitting on top of a hill inside the park's boundaries. Called Attaway Hill by the family, Kron, a pioneer physician living in the early 1800s, raised his family there while also being part of the civic life of Stanly County.

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During the dog days of summer, a visit to the air-conditioned history museum affords visitors a chance to learn about the Native American history around the park as well as discover the animals and plant life which make up the park's ecosystem.

COVID'S IMPACT

The entire world has had to adjust to the safety guidelines and challenges which have come from the COVID-19 pandemic, but some industries and organizations have actually flourished.

State parks have become more in demand this past year as people homebound for school and work needed a place to take off the mask and breathe in fresh air.

Where numbers had been going down for Morrow Mountain, the numbers significantly shot up. From 2016 to 2019, visitor attendance went from 512,427 to 452,862. When the pandemic hit, despite being closed for six weeks from March to May, the park saw 512,702 visitors in 2020.

Those visitor numbers increased despite the museum, swimming pool, boathouses and one of the group camping areas all being closed, as well as the restrooms. Traffic and finding parking spaces has taken some work from the park's rangers, along with ensuring visitors' compliance with the basic rules and regulations of the park (dogs on a leash, where people can park, etc.)

The highlight of the park, according to park superintendent Jeff Davidson, is the summit, and even it was closed for half of the year with a renovation of the overlook.

The overlook changes are something Davidson said "we have been wanting to do for years. It was great to be able to renovate that structure...with all the closures, we've still had a record visitation here which is outstanding."

Davidson noted the park was being used by locals and for folks to travel in, which brings in revenue to the small businesses in the county, along with a more diverse population enjoying the park.

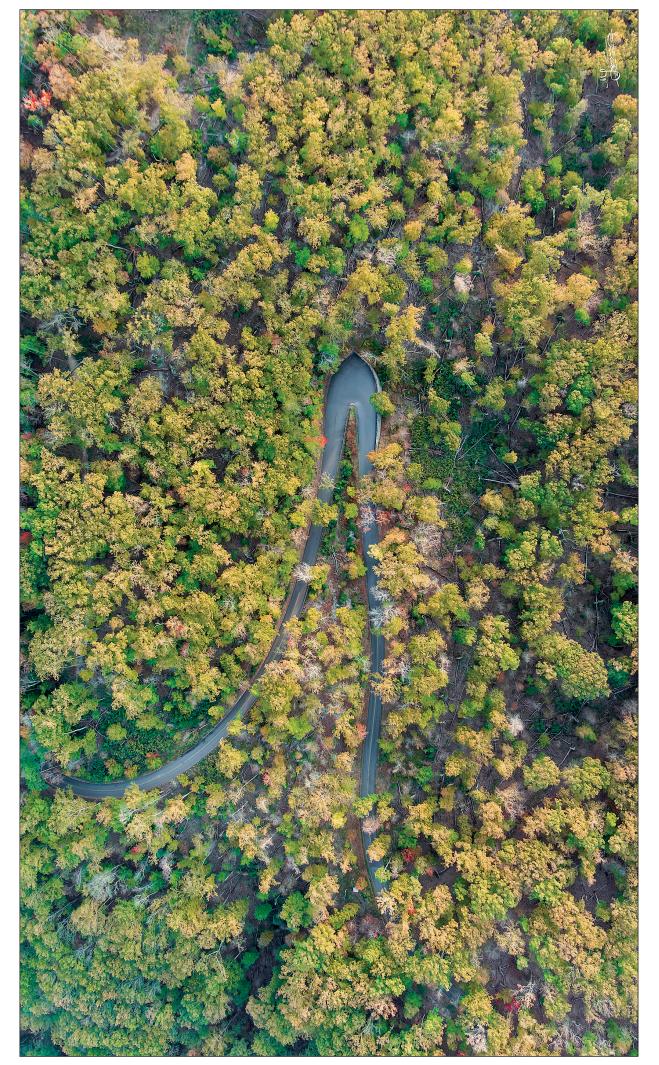
"We're getting a lot of folks traveling from Charlotte because they're all locked up in their apartments, their small houses, and they're wanting to get out of that," Davidson said.

"It's a chance to get outside," he said. "A lot of the younger generation are tied to their screen and electronic (devices). Now that has gotten old when you're sitting in the house on that all the time. You want to get outside and recreate."

FUTURE

Construction has continued throughout the country in the pandemic, as it has at Morrow Mountain and will continue in the years to come, according to Davidson.

A recent bond passed will bring \$1.5 million for building new cabins, a new shower house for the D camping loop and renovations to two other shower houses.



Photos Contributed by Michael Lanier with My Different Perspective





Morrow Mountain also received \$2.5 million from the General Assembly which will go to the same plans. Major renovations on the swimming pool and more work on the summit area, including more accessibility per the Americans with Disabilities Act and fixing the old shelter on the summit back into a concession stand, will happen. With all the many miles of trails, plans are also in the works to renovate the walking and horse trails, most of which Davidson noted were designed 50 to 60 years ago.

The park will also receive some emergency funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which will go to trail repairs and replacing the fishing pier at the lake which was destroyed in 2016.

Davidson said Morrow Mountain will also continue to market itself to continue to bring a diverse population of visitors in, trying to get people to spend more time in nature without their electronic devices.

"We are lucky to have a lot of roads in

our park that people can drive around," Davidson said, but he added "getting out of your vehicle and experiencing nature is important."

Photos Contributed by Michael Lanier with My Different Perspective

A recent 1,000-acre contribution from Alcoa will help the park grow as well. Davidson said a plan for the use of the land has not been completed yet, but one is being put together for review.



By Chris Miller

Catherine Katen last year purchased her dream house in Albemarle: a vintage 1930s property within walking distance of downtown and Pfeiffer University's new health science center. his will be the biggest home I've ever had," said Katen, who resides in California.

It's a 2,500-square-foot, four-bedroom, two- and a half-bath home. Her furniture arrived in October and was placed in the house.

Even though Katen's realtor Larry McGuire showed her several other properties last spring, the house was always on her mind and she ultimately purchased it in the summer via Zoom/ FaceTime.

Due to an exorbitant real estate market and a high population density, Katen wanted to leave her home near San Francisco, where she's lived her whole life, and move somewhere with more affordable housing and a more spacious environment. She decided on North Carolina and visited twice before the pandemic hit.

"I got there and... it was just a breath of fresh air for me," she said.

Katen was smitten with the small-

town charm of Albemarle. She also looks forward to visiting the county's natural treasures like Morrow Mountain State Park and the lakes.

But there's one catch: With Katen living in northern California and caring for her mother who has been in the hospital, she has not actually seen the house in-person, though McGuire did give her a virtual tour of the property. She is currently repairing her own home and hopes to relocate to Albemarle in the coming weeks. However, with the coronavirus pandemic still rampant in much of the country, especially California, she doesn't have a firm timeline for when she expects to move.

In order to be comfortable purchasing a home she'd never actually visited, Katen and McGuire developed a strong enough rapport that she came to trust him and his expertise.

"I really liked him and I followed my gut, which was to stay with Larry," she said. "He was very ethical and he didn't want to show me houses that were out of my budget. He didn't want to show me houses that he felt were not what I was looking for."

Katen's situation is just one example of how the coronavirus pandemic has affected the real estate industry over the past year. Many clients and realtors are taking to online platforms to collaborate rather than meeting in-person. Many house tours have also transitioned to the digital realm.

While prospective buyers might be going through additional loopholes during the pandemic, the housing market as a whole experienced a boom last year.

Home sales in the Charlotte region through December, which is the most up-to-date data, were up 5.5 percent compared to the same time in 2019, according to data from the Charlotte-based Canopy Realtor Association. The analysis applies to 16 counties across the Charlotte area, including Stanly County. "We didn't have to take much downtime and we were constantly daily getting emails for the first month to two months of the onset of COVID on what our protocols were as realtors, what we could and couldn't do and best practices to keep everybody safe."

- Wallace Crawford, Realtor

When focusing exclusively on Stanly, however, the increase was even larger. Home sales last year were up 12 percent through December, with 797 properties sold. A total of 711 properties were sold through November of the previous year. Pending sales were also up around 13 percent compared to 2019, while both median sales prices and average sales prices were up compared to the year before.

"We've had real estates up, the hottest it's ever been in our area," said Lee Allen, broker and owner of Re/Max Town and Country in Albemarle.

He noted that with many people no longer commuting to work, homes have become even more desirable as a place to both live and, since the pandemic, conduct business.

Allen said since the pandemic one of his biggest requests in searching for homes has been the inclusion of an office space where people can work.

"I would say that might be the number one question I get now," he said, noting that it was something he was rarely asked about before last year.

Wallace Crawford, an Oakboro realtor who works for Mathers Realty, said the biggest reason why the local housing market experienced so much success last year was due to low interest rates, which spurred many people to look into buying homes.

"As long as those interest rates stay low, the people are going to have a desire to buy, especially when rent rates are so exorbitant," Crawford said.

With so many people wanting to purchase homes, developers in the area that have access to large tracts of property are working quickly to develop them, County Planning Director Bob Remsburg said. "Because the demand is so high, they're able to command a fairly good price for the properties."

The Albemarle City Council in December approved a preliminary plat and a conditional use permit for a cluster subdivision off Moss Springs Road of 52 single family lots. The Stanfield Board of Commissioners has also reviewed a proposed 30 home subdivision off South Love Chapel Road.

The online real estate marketplace Zillow predicts that as strong as 2020 was for the housing market, 2021 could be even better.

According to Zillow, for a standard two bedroom, two bathroom, there were more than 160 homes in Stanly for sale in early 2021, with Albemarle making up the bulk of the total with roughly 80 homes. The website lists around 400 such homes sold in the county last year.

Allen said Locust, due to its proximity to Charlotte, and North Stanly, because of Pfeiffer University, are the areas where houses have really been selling over the last year.

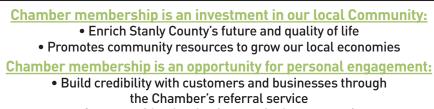
He noted the only thing that limited the sales last year from being even higher was a lack of inventory.

"In a healthy market, we've got about six months worth of inventory," he said. "Right now we've got about a month and a half worth of inventory."

According to Canopy Realtor Association data, homes in Stanly County were on the market for about two less weeks (46 days) throughout last year than they were in 2019 (61 days). When specifically zeroing in on home sales for December of last year, the discrepancy is even more prominent. Homes were on the market for only 28 days before being sold compared to 87 days in December 2019.

"We had more buyers than we had homes," McGuire said.

One reason realtors were not as affected by the pandemic as people in other industries, Crawford said, was due to the influence of the National Association of Realtors, which wields substantial power as a lobbying organization. NAR helped make sure realtors were listed as essen-



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720 NC 24/27 E., #1-D Albemarle, NC 28001 704-985-1700 90 DAYS SAME AS CASH tial workers during the early stages of the pandemic, which allowed them to continue working without missing a beat.

"We didn't have to take much downtime and we were constantly daily getting emails for the first month to two months of the onset of COVID on what our protocols were as realtors, what we could and couldn't do and best practices to keep everybody safe," Crawford said.

Throughout much of last year, real estate agents also adapted to how they interacted with prospective buyers. Instead of in-person home tours and open houses, virtual tours became more of the norm.

"We found ways to adapt very quickly," Crawford said.

With COVID-19 spreading quicker in more urban areas, many residents in cities like Charlotte relocated last year to rural counties like Stanly, Crawford said, noting that the county's low tax rate was a key incentive.

"You can get more dirt underneath your feet cheaper than anywhere else," he said about Stanly. "We're not quite the sleepy little place that we used to be."

Though anxious about driving across the country by herself, which she's never done before, Katen, the Californian, is ready for her big move to Albemarle.

"I'm so excited and delighted to get there," she said. "I feel like it's going to be a great home for me."





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By Chris Miller

Recyclable materials most people would deem disposable such as shopping bags, shampoo bottles and stretch film packaging are essential ingredients that help form the core products for the decking company Fiberon. Fiberon Composite Decking produces high-quality composite decking, railing and fencing. Aside from its manufacturing facility in New London, Fiberon also has a distribution center and recycling center in the town. The company has one other manufacturing facility in Idaho.

"In 1997, we had one or two machines...and 20-some-odd years later, we're a \$200 million company," Vice President of Operations and Supply Chain Mike Huskey said. He's worked at Fiberon for around 10 years after spending the majority of his career at Collins & Aikman in Albemarle.

Fiberon, which was sold in 2018 to Fortune Brand, a Fortune 500 company, employs around 440 workers in its three New London facilities. The products are shipped to Home Depot stores across the country and Canada and numerous wholesale distributors.

Though the bulk of its products are shipped across the country, Huskey said around 7 percent of the products are shipped around the world, including to South America, Australia and western Europe.

Fiberon decking products appeared on the HGTV show "Brother vs. Brother" in June 2017 and appeared on four episodes of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" in February 2020, according to marketing coordinator Travis Thornton.

AN EMPHASIS ON INNOVATION

While it's still a relatively young company, Huskey said what makes Fiberon stand out is its innovation. The company was the first to develop a hidden fastener system, where screws are fastened from the side and cannot be seen.

"It's a cleaner, nicer look," he said.

Fiberon also was the first to develop covering or capping for the deck composites which provide added protection against the elements. The cap, which contains UV inhibitors, is bonded to the deck material during the manufacturing process. The outer layer is known in the industry as a capstock.

Capped boards are incredibly resistant to staining, fading, moisture and insect infestation and they won't splinter or degrade, according to the company's website. All that's needed to keep them

fresh is an annual soap and water clean.

Fiberon was also the first decking company to produce composite PVC railing, according to its website.

"We're always looking at new innovation and new products," Huskey said.

Fiberon's recycling center, which is only a few miles from the manufacturing facility, takes about 70 million pounds of waste and converts it into small polyethylene pellets.

"Our product is 98 percent recycled," Huskey said.

According to its website, using recycled materials "prevents further deforestation and prevents unwanted materials from polluting the earth via incinerators or landfills."

THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS

The Fiberon manufacturing site in New London produces four products: PVC hand railings, foam decking composite, high density polyethylene decking composite and window profiles.

The composite decking is made from a mixture of different materials, including the polyethylene pellets and wood that comes from lumber mill scraps.

During the manufacturing process, multiple extruder machines combine measured quantities of raw materials, which comprise the inner core and capstock. The raw materials are wood flour (acquired from ground-up door frames, window trim and cabinetry) and recyclable plastics. Antioxidants and other surface protectants are also added along with color additives.

When the raw ingredients are mixed, they become melted and the capstone forms onto the wood core, creating a little thin coating, manufacturing trainer Denise Wall said.

When the wooden core reaches the right temperature, the machines deliver it to the dyes, which molds the core with the cap. Once the deck boards have been extruded, embossing wheels imprint wood grain patterns onto the board surface. This creates the realistic wood appearance that differentiates Fiberon products from other brands, she said.

Any scratched boards get grinded up and reused again in the extruder.

"We don't like to throw anything away, we just grind it up and reuse it," Wall said.

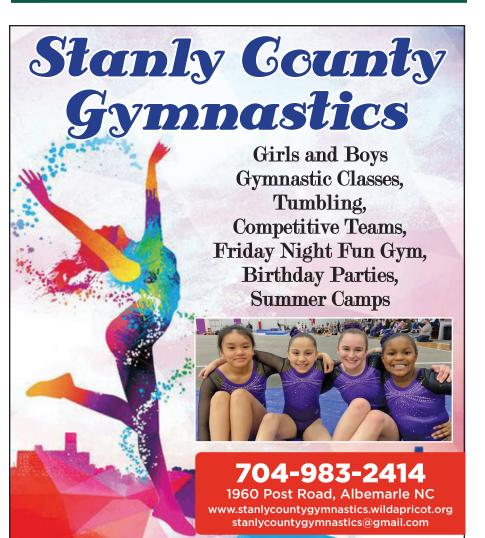
The decking boards then cool off in





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IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

Since the coronavirus pandemic first began in March 2020, many of the company's auxiliary employees, like those who work in sales and customer service, have primarily been working from home. Employees who work on the manufacturing floor still come to the facility each day — they just wear masks and do their best to socially distance. Plant manufacturing manager Chris Jack said that around 40 percent of all employees are working from home.

In addition to mask-wearing and social distancing, other safety measures enacted include sanitizing of equipment before the start of each new shift and having employees fill out questionnaires to make sure they have not had contact with others who tested positive.

With more people working from home, many have decided to remodel their decks and outdoor spaces, Jack said, which has resulted in increased business for Fiberon. As a result, while many companies have had to lay off people due to the pandemic, the opposite has occurred with Fiberon. The company has hired more than 50 employees in the community to fill open positions and it has added another 20 jobs ranging from electricians to supervision entry-level positions.

"We've been doing a good job of going out into the community and looking for those diamonds in the rough and giving them the training that we need to fill in those positions," Jack said.

Jack said that no employees have been laid off or furloughed as a result of the pandemic.

Fiberon has also shifted to conducting more online meetings via Zoom or Webex, which Jack sees as the new normal even after the pandemic ends. Instead of employees traveling to meet with officials from other branches of the company, online meetings can occur which are safer and more efficient, he said.

ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

Fiberon has a history of eco-friendly products and innovation, but what makes the company really special, according to conversations with workers, is the people.

Wall sees the workers each and every day. Her job is to train and prepare new workers when they first arrive at the company. She teaches employees all of the requirements that come with working at Fiberon, including job descriptions, using measuring tools, spotting defects and understanding the safety measures.

"It's exciting," Wall said about her job as a trainer, which she's done for three years. "Especially when I see someone that's struggling and then they end up being a great inspector."

Jack, the plant manufacturing manager, said the best part of the job for him is the relationships he's formed with his peers and seeing employees grow and develop their skills.

"In just the three years I've been here, I've seen tremendous individual growth from everyone that has worked here," he said.



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SPIRIT OF STANLY • **19** • MARCH 2021

PFEIFFER, SCC PROGRAMS TRAIN STUDENTS for Stanly's healthcare future

By Charles Curcio

In the healthcare field, one profession can cover a wide range of care for individuals and communities, from children to seniors, emergency rooms to postoperative wards and clinical care.

Students in two main college programs in Stanly, the Annie Ruth Kelly Associates Degree Nursing Program at Stanly Community College and the Pfeiffer University Nursing Department, earn a variety of degrees which often lead to jobs in the county, at the hospital, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and clinics throughout.

"A quality nursing education can be measured in many respects, such as national accreditation status, highly qualified nursing faculty, state-of-the-art technology, supportive organizational leadership, NCLEX- RN pass rates and job placement upon graduation," SCC Nursing Director Chassity Speight-Washburn said.

SCC, she said, "provides the public with safe, entry-level nurses from a program that successfully meets all of those metrics. The nursing program is proud of the graduate nurses that serve as part of today's healthcare heroes."

Regarding Pfeiffer's program, Dr. Martha Bramlett, department chair of the nursing program, said she and the faculty "are very proud of our nursing program at Pfeiffer and of the success of our students. It's gratifying to watch them go out into the world, some locally and others across the country. We give students from both our immediate area and around the country the opportunity to have an excellent education."

The underlying concept for Pfeiffer's program is caring, which "forms the ba-

sis of what nurses do every day. We also believe that caring is just as central to the teacher-student relationship as it is to nursing and we try to exemplify this in our program."

"Our students come out of the Pfeiffer nursing program with the ability to provide quality care and the foundation to move into graduate programs that prepare them for advanced practiced in a variety of settings. Our graduates are nurse practitioners, nurse managers and nurse educators and are taking leadership positions in providing excellent care to the public," Bramlett said.

Those students often get their start while still in high school, with many earning a Certified Nurses Aide (CNA) license.

According to Mandy Mills, director of vocational education for Stanly County Schools, students at any of the high schools can enroll in the Career and College Promise Nurse Aide Program offered by Stanly Community College in order to earn a CNA degree.

"It has traditionally been taught at Albemarle High School, but because of COVID it is being taught on the SCC campus right now. Students will typically take Health Science I and II from our high school CTE teachers before entering the CCP program," Mills said.

KAREN JARAMILLO

The world of nursing also includes a new role of nurse practitioner, which is



Caity Godfrey

an RN who can diagnose and treat patients.

While some nurses and nurse practitioners feel the calling from an early age, Karen Jaramillo was undecided after graduating from North Stanly and attending Pfeiffer.

Starting on a pre-med route, Jaramillo volunteered with the Stanly County Health Department as an interpreter, since she was fluent in Spanish because she and her family came to the county from Ecuador in 2002.

It was at the health department where she met the person whose role of nurse practitioner influenced her career path: Patti Lewis.

"She's the only one I have ever known there, and I fell in love with her role. I saw how much she impacted the nursing field, the medical field and her community. That's what drove me to pick nursing with the ultimate intent of being a nurse practitioner," Jaramillo said.

Jaramillo said it was the way Lewis was one-on-one with patients and was a provider to those patients.

Medical doctors "are just not the



Karen Jaramillo

same as when you see a nurse practitioner," she said.

She said the combination of being able to decide and diagnose for a patient and being one to "get patients through those times" made her want to be a nurse practitioner.

Along with having a good bedside manner, Lewis was known in the community and was part of programs and resources available from the Health De-



Zach Long partment, Jaramillo said.

"I have been very familiar for the last 20 years of how involved the local health department is with the Spanish-speaking community," she said. "A lot of the patient population within my Hispanic community was served by that department."

She had considered being a veterinarian when she was young, but she "got a little bit more realistic. I saw I had



Joy Sharpe

skills that needed to be used with me speaking Spanish... I felt like I needed to do something to really make a difference."

In her time at Pfeiffer, Jaramillo said she developed relationships with all her professors regardless of the subject.

"There's just something about that personal connection that I had with all of my professors, especially in the nursing program. I mean, even before I ac-





tually chose nursing as my major, I had that same connection with my science teachers," she said. "It didn't matter who they were. They knew my name. They knew who I was."

Graduating from Pfeiffer's nursing school in 2013, she briefly went to work in Charlotte and eventually earned her nurse practitioner degree from the Medical University of South Carolina. She worked in Troy before moving back to the clinic at Atrium Stanly.

She said she believes nurse practitioners "are in prime time roles for being leaders in the community...it goes beyond the clinic, beyond diagnosis, beyond treatment. It's leading the health promotion and disease prevention of a community."

CAITY GODFREY

Where as Jaramillo came to medicine later in life, 2011 North Stanly graduate Caity Godfrey said she always wanted to be a nurse.

First wanting to work in pediatrics, she changed her focus once and now works in the surgery center at Atrium Stanly.

On her first tour of Pfeiffer's nursing facility, Godfrey said she was impressed by the program's chairwoman, Diane Daniels, who told her the faculty and staff of the school "would do everything in their power for me to pass."

While warning her of how hard completing the program would be, Daniels said if she had to she would stay with her at her house until midnight studying.

"I knew that was the right place to go," Godfrey said. "They call it Pfeiffer Pfamily for a reason...we were a big family."

As many other Stanly County Schools students have previously, Godfrey started learning about nursing while still in high school. Along with the bookwork, SCS students get experience by shadowing working Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs) and nurses in Stanly's facilities.

In Godfrey's case, she spent two days a week at Bethany Woods Nursing Home, where she said after seeing the care given to residents, "I knew that was something I still wanted to do."

Helping people has always come naturally to her family, Godfrey said, noting members of her family have been members of Millingport Volunteer Fire Department. She also grew up around others in the medical field.

Many of her classmates when leaving high school wanted to get out of Stanly, go to somewhere bigger for school, and Godfrey was the same way to start with, but said she became homesick while at Lenoir-Rhyne.

"I didn't realize at the time how much Stanly County meant to me," Godfrey said.

Working in Stanly was important to her even before studying nursing. Devotees of the chicken and dumplings and other dishes made at Handi-Mart will recognize Godfrey, who worked there for about 10 years.

That focus on working locally continued when Godfrey started working at Atrium Stanly in the surgery center, where she still sees family friends, former teachers and customers from the Burleson Square restaurant routinely come through the hospital.

"You can tell it means so much if they know somebody that's (working) at the hospital," Godfrey said. "Especially now with COVID. They're alone. They're scared. Just having somebody from Stanly County that you know makes all the difference in the world... there is always some kind of connection you can make."

One challenge with the pandemic, she said, was how more patients are being taken care of at home instead of at the hospital, something she studied her senior year in a community health class.

"You're seeing more and more nurses having to do home health care, taking care of patients outside of the hospital," Godfrey said.

Outpatient surgeries were shut down for the first four months of the pandemic, so like others she saw her job change to different duties, which has led to burnout for many healthcare workers.

"Nurses are tired. They're overworked. They're underpaid and understaffed," Godfrey said.

Despite the challenges, she said she would still advise students they do not have to go beyond Stanly's borders to get an excellent education in nursing. At places like Pfeiffer, students get more personalized attention, which may not happen at larger institutions, she said.

At Pfeiffer, one of her fellow stu-

dents passed away, which brought herself and her classmates together like family, she said.

"You don't have to go out of the county to be a nurse."

ZACH LONG

Professionals in the nursing profession come from all walks of life, including a small percentage of men.

Zach Long was a 2015 Mount Pleasant High School graduate who found his way into nursing by a fluke.

A friend of his mentioned the Certified Nurses Aide program at SCC, so he went through the program with her. He fell in love with everything about nursing.

Unlike Stanly County Schools students, Long said, he was not offered the chance to earn his CNA degree while in high school. He earned it when he was 20 after working some following graduation.

"(Nursing) was not really what I was planning on doing right out of high school," he said. "I was thinking I was going into teaching in theater."

In the year he entered SCC, there were only two other male nurses out of

a class of 60 students. Near the end of his first year, he said he was struggling and thinking about quitting.

However, teacher, Angela Hamby sat down with him despite her overly busy schedule to encourage him.

"She sat down and asked me what I wanted with my life. She pretty much convinced me to stay in the program and give it my all," Long said.

He previously flunked pharmacology, but came back to school and graduated in 2020 with a drive-through ceremony. Long said had it not been for the support system in place at SCC, he probably would have given up.

Being a male nurse is different, he said, but only to a slight degree. Apart from sometimes being mistaken for a physician, which he said is often an automatic assumption, Long said people will see him and remark how much male nurses are needed.

The only time being a male nurse is different is if a female patient needs to be changed. Often they will prefer for a female nurse to do it.

Long works in the intensive care unit at Atrium Stanly, which in the past year has been at maximum capacity because



of the COVID-19 pandemic. Immediately upon graduating, he was "thrown right into the COVID patient rooms and told to get to work."

Dealing with the stress of the pandemic for Long has been to establish boundaries, he said, adding "a good way of getting burned out is constantly being the yes person...at the end of the day, you're there to help people, but also you have to look out for yourself and keep yourself safe. You're not going to be able to keep anybody safe if you're at that point where you're burned out and overworked."

When the pandemic is over, Long said he hopes he will be able to look at things and be grateful for how it is since he has gotten used to working in these "extreme times."

"I've kind of gone through the worst of it. Anything else will be a cakewalk."

JOY SHARPE

One nurse from Montgomery County brings another perspective to the job, having attended both SCC and Pfeiffer and taking her talents back home.

Joy Sharpe was homeschooled. She

"I knew that was the right place to go. They call it Pfeiffer Pfamily for a reason... we were a big family."

- Caity Godfrey

began taking college and career training classes when she was a sophomore at SCC and Montgomery Community College. She earned her CNA license when she was 16.

Taking classes with older students did not take much adjustment, she said.

"I knew what my goals were and what I had to do to achieve them," Sharpe said.

Sharpe earned her high school diploma early and entered into the Kelley Nursing Program at SCC when she was 17. She earned a nursing degree last May while working an apprenticeship at Atrium Stanly, then immediately took a position with the hospital in the surgical unit.

The SCC program taught more than just the knowledge needed to be a nurse,

Sharpe said. Nursing students get technical hands-on learning right away. She had clinicals her first week in nursing school, she said, where as some students do not do clinicals until their last two years of a four-year program.

Recently, Sharpe left her position in Stanly to work in the recovery room at First Health Montgomery Memorial Hospital, but it does not mean her education is over.

She is enrolled in the bachelor's program at Pfeiffer, which she said has been interesting because some things taught at a bachelor degree's level she received previously at SCC, including management, leadership and coordinated care topics.

Studying at Pfeiffer is like being part of a family, Sharpe said, noting she has studied virtually, but the Dean of Nursing Bramlett still finds time to talk to her on FaceTime for 90 minutes.

Pfeiffer wants to get graduates from the SCC nursing program, Sharpe explained, saying the school got her application through quickly, waving microbiology and chemistry until she can take the classes in the fall.

"They really worked with me and they want me to graduate because I went to Stanly," Sharpe said. "I love the homey atmosphere and how close it was to home. It was just a natural flow for me to go from Albemarle on to Misenheimer."

She also opted out of several classes because of taking AP classes when being homeschooled.

Already a registered nurse, Sharpe said she wants to earn a master's degree in nursing.

For future students, Sharpe recommends they keep their future in mind, save their money, but also look for scholarships locally at churches and community groups.

"Be proud of going to either school. It's hard work."



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By Chris Miller

Though it's gone by many names over the years, Auria Solutions has a long history of producing a variety of automotive components, including carpets.

With a manufacturing plant in Albemarle, Auria Solutions' major domestic customers include General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, along with Toyota, Honda and Nissan, Mercedes, BMW and Volkswagen.

Albemarle native John Moose, who held various sales positions with the former company, Collins & Aikman, before later becoming its president, helped develop relationships with Toyota, Honda and Nissan in Japan during the 1970s. The company was the first American supplier of materials to Toyota, according to Vice President of Advanced Development Ernie Wilson, who worked with Moose.

Originally Collins & Aikman, the company moved one of its plants from Philadelphia to Albemarle in 1955 to take advantage of the city's water supply.

"Water is what brought Collins & Aikman to establish this plant here," Wilson said.

Collins & Aikman originally produced automotive body cloth for car seats. The cloth was already woven with yarn in plants like Siler City and then was dyed in Albemarle. At one point, the Albemarle plant used more than 2 million gallons of water per day to dye the yarn, Wilson said.

Eventually the Albemarle site began producing automotive floor carpeting in addition to the body cloth, while also continuing to dye the yarn. For a short time, the company also made carpet fabric for the airline industry.

In 2007, Collins & Aikman was purchased by International Automotive Components after going to Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The company closed down four N.C. plants after it filed for bankruptcy, but the Albemarle site survived.

A decade later in 2017, Shanghai Shenda Co. and IAC completed a joint venture and formed Auria Solutions. There are two other Auria sites in North Carolina — one in Troy and one in Old Fort.

The Albemarle facility, on Bethany Road off U.S. Highway 52, is about 522,231 square feet and employs more than 160 workers.

Auria Solutions, like most companies over the past year, has been greatly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

All of the company's North American plants, including the one in Albemarle, were shut down for anywhere from 4-8 weeks, Senior Director of Operations Todd Brandon said.

"During the downtime, we went to work on a Covid Protocol playbook and implemented many safety precautions including a daily thermal temp scan, daily sanitizing, employee training, visual management for social distancing, etc.," Brandon said.

Though the pandemic didn't disrupt the Albemarle branch's supply chain, there was an initial layoff of employees, though Brandon said that "we were able to recall most of those team members as volumes have increased."

"2020 was a difficult year to navigate with this pandemic," Brandon added. "But, I cannot be more proud and thankful of the team members that helped us navigate this journey."

THE TUFTING PROCESS

The Albemarle site manufactures carpet flooring through a process called tufting. In the simplest of terms, yarn gets fed into a machine that pulls it through a series of needles.

"It's like a big sewing machine, except instead of one sewing needle, you've got hundreds," Wilson said, adding that as the yarn gets sewn it also simultaneously gets cut. The yarn gets stitched into the back of a piece of polyester fabric called a substrate.

Wilson said it is critical that as the yarn is being sewn into the fabric, the cutting is timed correctly so everything is cut at the same pile height.

Auria has three tufting gauges — a 1/8th gauge (8 needles per inch), which is used for entry level vehicles, a 1/10th gauge (10 needles per inch), which is the most common and used for mid-range vehicles, and a 5/64th gauge (12.8 needles per inch), which is used for luxury vehicles such as Mercedes or Cadillac. The tufted fabric is then sent through infrared lights, which helps to soften the yarn and bulk it out.

The tufted carpet is shipped to sites in Fremont, Ohio and Queretaro, Mexico before being shipped to car companies.

"IT GOT TO BE A HABIT COMING TO WORK"

John Furr has been with the company for 57 years. He originally worked at a mill in Concord before friends who were working at Collins & Aikman convinced him to come back to his hometown to work at the company. He came to work for the company in 1963. h

Furr started in the fabric department rolling up fabric before later moving to inspecting automotive fabrics. Once the company transitioned from producing mainly automotive fabrics to producing carpets, which Furr called the biggest change during his time with the company, his jobs and responsibilities again shifted.

He did various odd jobs including inspecting carpets and operating a forklift to move carpets. He currently is a member of the latex coating team.

Furr, who's in his late 70s, said he's probably had around 15 to 20 different jobs during his time with the company. Brandon said it's "mind-boggling" to think Furr has spent more than half a century at the company.

"He still brings the same energy and enthusiasm and we enjoy seeing him every day," Brandon said.

"I've enjoyed the work and it's paid for my house," Furr said, adding he's had a lot of good friends that he's worked with. "It got to be a habit coming to work."

He mentioned the secret to working at a place for as long as he has is taking it one day at a time and having good

. health.

"If you watched him work every day you'd swear he just started day one," said operations manager Lyle Moose. "He has a lot of energy.

"He sets an example by being here every day and I think that says a lot to the younger employees," Moose added.

He said of the 110 employees that work for him in manufacturing, the median age is 21 years of service at the company. Many of the employees have worked at the company for more than 30 years, including Moose, who has been there for around 40 years.

Furr has no immediate plans to retire, though the idea has crossed his mind from time to time.

Moose said what attracted him to Collins & Aikman when he was a young kid out of college was the facility and the large equipment, along with the management structure.

"I just thought: heavy equipment, manufacturing, it looks like a longterm employer," he said.

Brandon, who has been with the company since 1987, said he was initially attracted to the people. Interacting with people on the production floor and seeing their worth ethic, "it was attractive and it was infectious," he said.

Even though the business has gone through several name changes over the years, the core of the company has stayed the same. Moose thinks this stability is a big reason why so many employees, including family members, have stayed for so long.

THE KAIZEN PROCESS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY

The company's relationship with Toyota helped lead to a restructuring of the Albemarle site during the 1980s.

"They (Toyota) kind of preached incremental improvement," Moose said. "You didn't do it all with technology, you did it with making small changes that eventually make a big difference."

In the early 2000s, Collins & Aikman adopted the Kaizen method of continuous improvement, which the Toyota Production System is famous for utilizing. Kaizen is a concept referring to business activities that continuously improve all functions and involve all employees from the head of the company to the assembly workers.

"It takes waste out of the system," Brandon said. "You analyze your processes and you want to try and improve those processes."

He said with the Kaizen process, individual workers have more of a voice and can really feel connected to their specific department. Employees who are part of Kaizen teams (many of them include both hourly and salary workers) go through a one-day training to learn about the components of the process. The team works on various types of improvement, including safety, quality and productivity.

The Albemarle location has been one of the top-rated Auria facilities when it comes to safety. It had the best safety record of all the Auria sites around the world in 2019, Moose said. In 2020, the site had only one recordable injury.

"We've got an excellent safety record over the years," Moose said. "Safety has always been No. 1 — we preach it, we talk it, we walk it and yet we still find things to fix and make better."

The importance of safety is ingrained within the culture of the company and is at the heart of what makes it a stable work environment.

"If you don't have safety at the forefront, you're not going to stay here long," Moose said.



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The Snuggs House is the oldest dwelling in Albemarle which still stands on its original site. (Photo courtesy of Megan Sullivan)

By Chris Miller

Over the years, one of the best ways for people in Stanly County to catch a glimpse of life in the past has been to take a walk through the oldest dwelling in Albemarle which still stands on its original site — the I.W. Snuggs House, located at 112 N. Third St.

The house, which has been around for almost 170 years, has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1995 and is frequented by hundreds of people each year, including many local students during field trips. While it has been renovated over the years, the property's decor and overall aesthetic is still representative of a typical antebellum southern home.

Located just behind the house is the Freeman-Marks House, which was built in 1847, though the house was later moved to its current location.

The Snuggs House has been around almost as long as the county itself, which was formed in 1841.

"It represents the history of Stanly County as it was being formed, in preand post-Civil War," said Stanly County History Center Director Megan Sullivan. "It really lets people of Stanly County know their history and have a personal connection to the people who lived here before and see what life was like for them."

Being one of the prized historical gems in the county, it played a big factor in Sullivan accepting the position as museum director five years ago.

"I think it's pretty rare to have these kind of houses still exist in counties," she said. "I felt that the county really recognized and appreciated their history and where they came from."

With so many houses in the South being destroyed and burned during the Civil War, Sullivan said it's even more notable that both the Snuggs and Freeman-Marks' properties are still around and in good condition.

As a way to encourage more people to explore the house and its history, the Stanly County Historical Society, which owns it and the Freeman-Marks House, has been raising money for the continued preservation of both historical properties. The house is open to the public from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month.

"To me, those houses are a touch-

stone to a past that we need to be aware of because our future and where we are in the present is largely built on people and places that have been here before," said Historical Society secretary Jim Sawyer.

HISTORY OF MR. SNUGGS

Deeds and tax records indicate the house was built in 1852 by David Austin, who purchased the lot in 1848 for \$15, according to the information from the Stanly County Museum. The house changed hands numerous times over the next 20 years before being purchased by Lafayette Green, a prominent attorney and a member of the House of Representatives, in 1865.

Isaiah Wilson Snuggs, who was born in Randall's community near what is now Norwood, purchased the log house from Green eight years later for \$375.

Snuggs fought for the Confederate Army in the Civil War in 1864, where he became wounded in the right leg during the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House in Virginia. He was hospitalized and his right leg amputated. He later got a pegleg, according to Sullivan. Soon after recovery, Snuggs was imprisoned at Elmira, New York for the remainder of the war.

After the war, Snuggs returned to Albemarle, where he worked with his cousin as a saddle maker and leatherworker. He married Ellen Milton and settled down to raise a family. Almost immediately after purchasing the cabin from Greene, Snuggs went to work improving and expanding the structure, transforming the cabin's original core into a modern two-story home.

By the mid-1880s, Snuggs added a second story to the home for his growing family — two daughters, Bertie and Mary, and two sons, Edgar and Henry.

Snuggs came to hold several local offices in the county, including treasurer, register of deeds and sheriff. As sheriff, Snuggs interacted with a variety of politicians, community leaders and law breakers, according to the museum. "He was a very colorful character," Sullivan said of Snuggs.

One of his most famous prisoners was Alec Whitley.

Whitley was accused of theft and murder in Stanly County and in Arkansas. Following a short manhunt through several states, he was captured by a local group near Big Lick in 1892.

Shortly after his capture and incarceration, a mob of angry citizens gathered at the jail (where the library now stands) to demand Whitley be turned over to them. Snuggs had been alerted to the mob's intention and he transferred all the prisoners from the jail to his own home across the street — except Whitley, who was seized by the mob, beaten and hanged from a tree off South Street.

The museum notes that Snuggs was also a skilled businessman, investing in real estate, timber and a saw mill. The saw mill was on what is now the northeast corner of First Street and King Avenue. It is believed lumber cut and tooled at his mill was used to expand the Snuggs House in the mid-1880s.

The house has undergone numerous renovations and remodels over the years. At one point in the 1970s, the property was renovated to serve as offices and exhibition space for the County Historic Properties Commission and Historic Museum. In the last decade, structural repairs to the foundation and the porch were completed, a new (historically accurate) roof was installed and sheetrock and paneling have been pulled away to reveal original wall surfaces and allow closer examination of both the original log structure and renovations done since 1874.

A HAUNTED HISTORICAL HOUSE?

While Sullivan has never personally experienced any paranormal activity, she does know people who have. Sullivan noted that one of the prior museum directors, Jonathan Underwood, experienced odd happenings inside the house.

Sullivan has heard from others that at times certain items would be knocked over "and the weight of the items made it specifically impossible for them to have fallen over by themselves." During another incident, a picture supposedly fell off the wall and was later found halfway across the room.

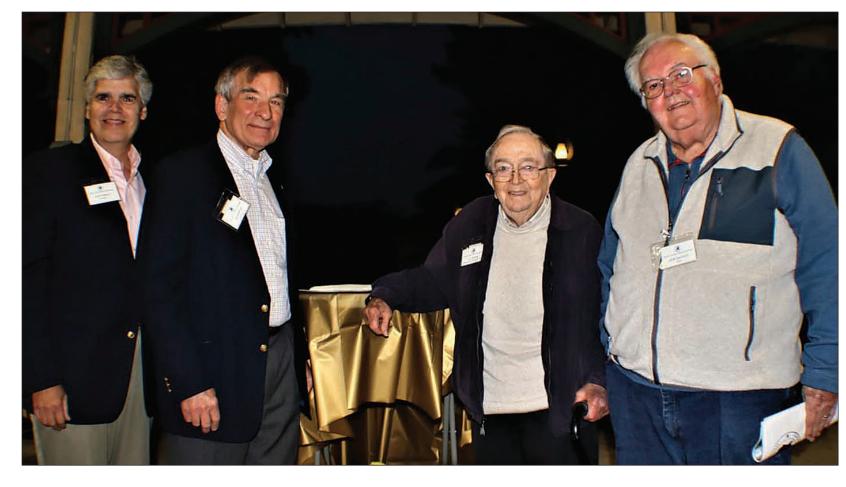
Sullivan recalls that one time local storyteller Susan Sharples was giving a



The Snuggs family, circa 1885. From left: William Henry, Isaiah Wilson, Bertha Estella, Mary Cleveland, Ellen Douglas Milton, and Edgar Eugene Snuggs. (Photo courtesy of Megan Sullivan)



To learn more or to donate to SCCM, visit www.sccminc.org



Kent Harkey, Jim Sawyer, Dr. J.C. Boone and Dr. Robert Gaither have launched a campaign to raise funds to help Stanly County Historical Society maintain the Freeman-Marks House and the Isaiah W. Snuggs House. (Photo courtesy of Kent Harkey)

tour when a man made a disparaging comment about I.W. Snuggs' daughter's wedding dress. As the man was walking across the hallway, one of the chandelier light bulbs exploded over his head.

Sullivan also included the house as part of her interactive ghost tour last fall, due to the lynching of Whitley.

According to an excerpt from an article in the Salisbury Post regarding Whitley: "Over the years, (museum) staff have reported a variety of unexplained incidents, leading to at least one volunteer to quit. If you happen to attend a tour at the Snuggs House be sure to be careful; it is possible that the ghost of Alec Whitley still resides there, seeking his revenge from beyond the grave."

RAISING MONEY FOR THE PROPERTIES

Two years ago, the Stanly County Historical Society, which was incorporated in 2013, negotiated with the Stanly County Board of Commissioners to accept ownership of the Historic Isaiah W. Snuggs House and the Freeman-Marks House. Both of these properties were restored by the Stanly County Historic Preservation Commission during the period of 1975-1986.

After conducting a feasibility study to determine the society's ability to ac-

cept responsibility of the recurring costs of operation and capital improvements of the properties, it established an endowment fund to perpetually care for the historic properties.

Last November, the society launched a six-month financial campaign to raise funds for the continued preservation of the two houses. Historical Society President Kent Harkey said that as of Feb. 4, the society has attained 50 percent of its \$550,000 goal from legacy gifts and pledges.

The Historical Society continues to make necessary improvements on the homes. Last year the group completed interior painting of three rooms in the Snuggs House, along with removing the large oak tree in the front yard. From April through December, the Historical Society incurred more than \$21,000 in operational expenses and capital improvements for the museum houses, Harkey said.

The coronavirus pandemic forced the Historical Society to cancel its in-person education programs last year, though the group was able to transition to online presentations which can be can be accessed from historicstanly. org or viewed on its YouTube channel. Harkey said that while the traditional programs often averaged between 100



Ellen McCarter and Dustin Adcock plant new plants at the Historic Snuggs House.

to 150 people in attendance, the online presentations "are being viewed by nearly three times that number."

The Historical Society's marketing and special events committee has outdoor events planned throughout 2021. It partnered with Uwharrie Bottle Club in March to host its annual antique bottle show and in April will host a quilt show with Three Rivers Quilt Guild. A number of lawn concerts are also scheduled throughout the year.



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