Spirit of Stanly

Meet Emily Prudden

page 10

Right at Home at Ly Cuisine

page 17

Youth Arts show Talent

page 24

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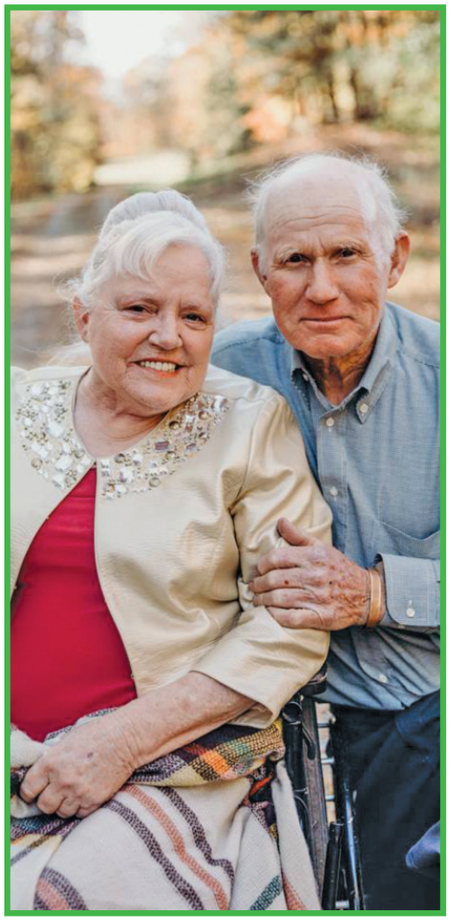

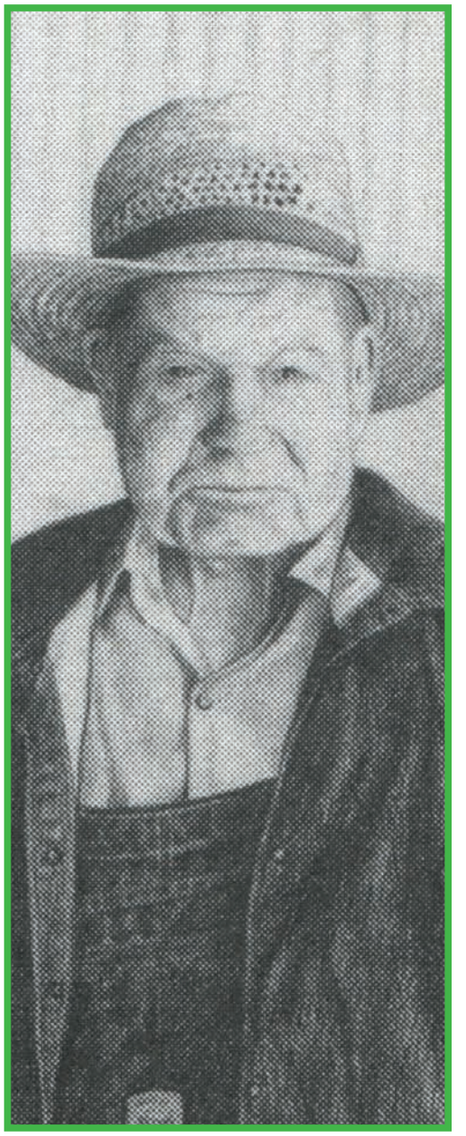

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Spirit of Stanly 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spirit of Stanly is a March 2022 publication of The Stanly News & Press.

Editor
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Cover photo by Charles Curcio: A toast to the spirit of Stanly County. Contributed photographs from: City of Albemarle, Kelsey Funeral Home, Ly Cuisine, Uwharrie Bank, Oakboro Regional Museum, Stanly County Museum, The Talent Company, My Different Perspective and YMCA.

MEET THE MUNICIPALITIES

ALBEMARLE

The county seat for Stanly, Albemarle has the biggest population (16,684) and land area (15 square miles) in the county.

Incorporated in 1857, the city has a 2,000-seat arena, the Stanly County Agri-Civic Center, along with many businesses from an active downtown area to the city limits.

Albemarle's downtown recently has grown with the addition of the Pfeiffer University Center for Health Sciences as well as several restaurants and nightlife spots.

A former textile town, Albemarle is reinventing itself as a town with tremendous outdoor assets, including many parks and the Carolina Treetop Challenge, a military-style obstacle course. The town also features Fox Chase, a professional-level disc golf course at Chuck Morehead Park.

BADIN

One of the oldest towns in the county, Badin (population 2,006) was formed in 1917 as a company town by ALCOA. The town is recognized in the National Register of Historic places and is the home of the 1913 Badin Inn, a bed-and-breakfast with a private disc golf course next to it.

The town's public boat and beach access to Badin Lake, along with its proximity to Morrow Mountain State Park, bring many visitors to the small town.

MISENHEIMER

Located in the northern part of Stanly, Misenheimer (population 762) is the home of Pfeiffer University's original campus. It was incorporated in 2003.

The village was originally a railroad stop for a nearby tourist spot called Misenheimer Springs, along with the nearby Barringer Gold Mine. Misenheimer is also home to Gray Stone Day School.

LOCUST

The second-largest town in Stanly, Locust (population 3,343) calls itself "A City With a Soul" and is among the fastest growing municipalities in the county.

With four-lane access to Charlotte and Albemarle, Locust has attracted many businesses, restaurants and recreational areas like Red Bridge Golf Club.

Locust was formed in 1860 and was known even then as a crossroads between Cabarrus, Anson and Mecklenburg counties. The name comes from a locust tree from which a well was dug close to the tree. For years, the town was "Locust Level," but the name was shortened in 1894.

NEW LONDON

One of the oldest incorporated towns in Stanly, New London traces its roots back to 1830 when it was known as Bilesville. The name was changed in the late 1870s, due in part to a former manager of the local Parker gold and metal mine.

The town (population 742) was incorporated in 1891 and now features the new New London Memorial Park with picnic shelters, facilities and walking trails.

New London also has a new town hall, community center and the historical museum. The town has two distinct residential areas, the original town and the Random Hills subdivision.

The Tarheel ChalleNGe Academy and Christ the King Academy both call New London home, along with businesses which employ approximately 900 people.

NORWOOD

The third-most populated town of Stanly, Norwood's roots date back to 1791 and a land grant for a place which was wiped out by a typhoid epidemic in 1810.

That town is now at the bottom of a lake which is part of the town's motto, "Gateway To Lake Tillery." Norwood (population 2,512) is just minutes away from the lake with marina access and many homes located around the body of water.

Norwood is one of the first towns in North Carolina to approve a new social district which will allow ABC-licensed establishments to serve on sidewalks and in public areas.

OAKBORO

This town in the western part of Stanly first was known as Furr Town and was a railroad stop in 1913. Two years later, the town's name was changed to Oakboro to reflect the name of a local cotton mill, later to be known as Stanly Knitting Mills.

Oakboro's population may soon be on the rise with the construction of a new factory for Charlotte Pipe and Foundry, along with many housing developments being constructed and planned for the town of 2,128 people.

The area on Main Street draws thousands every Fourth of July for the town's week-long festivities, including pageants, fair rides, festival food and family fun.

RICHFIELD

Despite being the smallest of Stanly's municipalities, the town of 545 people in the northern part of the county sees many people come to and through the town.

Formed first as Ritchie's Mill in the early 1890s, the town was rechristened Richfield in 1893 when the town's post office was opened. The town's charter was later renewed in 1941.

Richfield is at the intersection of U.S. Highway 52 and N.C. Highway 49, which connects Albemarle to Salisbury and Charlotte to Asheboro.

The town features a public park built in 1971 with multiple fields for baseball and softball, attracting visiting teams from out of town during youth sports seasons which run throughout the year.

RED CROSS

One of the newest towns in Stanly, Red Cross (population 782) has existed as a community since the 1700s as a transportation junction. It was incorporated in 2002.

The town's name comes from the red clay roads which used to exist, but are now paved.

Located on the four-lane N.C. Highway 24-27, Red Cross has many agricultural properties in its area but has plans for a town center which would had commercial and residential development.

STANFIELD

The town's small but active Main Street area belies the 1,602 residents who live in a place whose motto is "Welcome Home."

Stanfield's proximity to a larger town like Locust allows residents of Stanfield to be close to shopping and businesses but give families a more cost effective place to live.

The town features Pete Henkel Park with ball fields along with close to a mile of sidewalks in 35-mile per hour driving zones to allow families to walk safely. Plans are to extend sidewalks from Stanfield to the Locust city limits to allow people better access to the town without needing to drive there.

VINEYARDS ABOUND IN STANLY COUNTY

Ken and Marie Furr enjoy a toast at their Stony Mountain Vineyards. Photos by Charles Curcio

By Charles Curcio

The art of winemaking in Stanly County has quickly blossomed into distinctive wineries, each with its own unique characteristics.

Dennis, Stony Mountain and Uwharrie vineyards offer fine wines and beautiful settings in which to enjoy them, either on your own or as part of parties, weddings and other special events.

MUSCADINE IS A MUST

Dennis Vineyards and Winery, at 24043 Endy Road, was the first winery to open in the county in 1997 by Prichard Dennis.

In the 1980s, Dennis began making wine as a hobby and passed the hobby on to his son, Sandon. Both gave away the wine they made for years before the winery opened in 2000.

Specializing in muscadine wines, Dennis features popular lines of sweet and dry wines, many of which can be found on local grocery shelves and at the winery.

With fun holiday names like "Blitzed" and "Santa's Secret" and the popular "Holiday" line to best sellers like the Spring wine, Dennis has a wide selection of muscadine favorites.

> "I don't know of any winery in the state which can compare with our vista."
>
> - Ken Furr, Owner, Stony Mountain Vineyards

Photos by Charles Curcio

Dennis also has the Carlos Dry and chardonnay wines for those who like their wines dry.

JUST A STONE'S THROW AWAY

In terms of proximity to Albemarle, Stony Mountain Vineyards is the closest at 26370 Mountain Ridge Road.

Sitting in a mountain range said to be one of the oldest land masses in North America, the vineyard grew grapes for a long time but now it's more of a winery, according to owner Ken Furr.

Stony Mountain gets grapes from as nearby as in the state and as far away as New York and California to make its wines. Relying far less on muscadine grapes, Stony Mountain uses 19 varieties of grapes to make more dry and semi-dry wines. Those European dry and semi-dry wines rest in barrels for up to two years to give them their full flavor, both red and white.

One aspect which makes Stony Mountain unique is the view from the back porch, where visitors can enjoy a bottle of wine and enjoy elevated views of the Yadkin River.

"I don't know of any winery in the state which can compare with our vista," Furr said.

UWHARRIE VINEYARDS

The tagline for the third Stanly vineyard probably raises an eyebrow or two when viewed online, but describes the feelings of the owners: "Serious Wines for Non-Serious People."

Named for the nearby mountain range, the vineyard is at 28030 Austin Road, just off N.C. Highway 73 in the Millingport community. Uwharrie features a wide range of dry and semi-dry red and white wines to sweeter fruit wines.

Chad Andrews, the winemaker for Uwharrie, said the winery "tries to make (a wine) for all different types of people."

Noting that many people living in the Carolinas were born elsewhere and moved here, Andrews said "you have to play with people's different taste buds."

He also added Uwharrie "tries not to rush" when making its wines.

"We try to make the quality that we want," Andrews said.

One unique aspect of Uwharrie Vineyards is the amount of land the property has — 87 acres in all. As a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, visitors may see a variety of wildlife while enjoying a beautiful day outdoors or just sitting on the patio.

Dave Braswell, who along with his wife Anne founded Uwharrie, had the idea for staying connected with wildlife.

"It's just so unique to (be able to) get out of the Charlotte area, which has become so saturated," Andrews said of the vineyards' wildlife.

The property features bird houses and bat houses, which help the vineyards as well with bats taking care of many insects at night. Andrews said the bats' efforts mean "less chemicals you're having to buy and spray."

Andrews said keeping visitors connected to local businesses and restaurants is a part of Uwharrie's efforts, recommending them to people either not from or new to the county.

Adding chairs, a water fountain and soft music in the background, he said, enhances the ambience of Uwharrie Vineyards.

"We try to get people to come out and relax for the afternoon." ◆

MEET EMILY PRUDDEN

By Chris Miller

When it comes to Pfeiffer University, few names are as inextricably tied to the institution as founder Emily Prudden.

A statue of her stands in front of the administration building, with her hands clutching several books, an apt portrayal since her lifelong passion for education helped lead to the creation of several schools in North Carolina.

Born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1832, Prudden spent the first part of her life raising the children of her dead sister. Once they were older, she was invited by friends in 1882 to teach at the Brainard Institute in South Carolina.

"She got down there and realized pretty quickly that this was something that she could do," Pfeiffer University Archivist Jonathan Hutchinson said. "She had found her calling."

Although not much is known about Prudden's academic career, Hutchinson said she at least finished high school. She came from an affluent family, with one of her direct ancestors having played a key role in the early days of Congregationalism.

After soaking up as much knowledge as possible about what it takes to operate a school, Prudden sold her inheritance and moved to North Carolina to start building her own.

In 1884, at the age of 52, she opened All Healing Springs School in Gaston County. This was the first of at least 15 co-ed schools she established. The curriculum at the schools often included French and Bible classes.

Prudden would typically get each school running on a $300 budget, according to a 2013 Stanly News & Press article about Pfeiffer's first 50 years.

"She wanted to give students, especially in the South, educational opportunities that she had," Hutchinson said.

She did all this despite some key hindrances: She was nearly deaf for most of her life and needed two canes to walk due to an accident during her teenage years resulting in her having arthritis.

Prudden operated a similar playbook each time: She would purchase property, establish a school and help run it for one to two years before selling it to a religious organization and moving on to repeat the process. Each property consisted of at least two buildings, one for the school and one where the students lived.

Prudden's passion for providing educational opportunities to young people transcended race. In several instances, Prudden purchased nearby property to open schools for African American children. Hutchinson is aware of at least two such schools.

Her reputation steadily spread throughout the state with each new school, to the point where people often sought her out to open ones in their home counties.

"In most cases, they thrived, they did well up until when the public school system started growing in the 1920s," Hutchinson said, at which point many began to close.

Fittingly, the only school she founded that is still in existence is Pfeiffer. She opened its forerunner, Oberlin Home and School, at the end of the 19th century on Lick Mountain in Caldwell County, though the specific date is in question. The accepted founding of the school is 1885, but Hutchinson believes Oberlin was more likely opened by Prudden in 1898.

Prudden's passion for education resulted in the founding of several schools, including Pfeiffer. Photo by Chris Miller

After spending several years at the school, where she also was an instructor, Prudden turned it over to the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1903. The school was later renamed the Ebenezer Mitchel Home and School.

The community was already somewhat skeptical about the school since it was founded by a northerner but the fault lines began to emerge even more after one of the teachers, a woman named Pauline Abbott, did an interview with her hometown newspaper in Cincinnati in an effort to raise money.

In the article, Abbott was quoted as saying, among other things, that the people of Caldwell didn't know who George Washington was, had never heard a piano and didn't know what ice cream was. Once the story got back to the community, tensions began to flare.

"That pretty much divided the community," Hutchinson said, noting there were people who wanted Abbott to stay and those who wanted her to leave.

> "She wanted to give students, especially in the South, educational opportunities that she had."
>
> - Jonathan Hutchinson, Pfeiffer University Archivist

Things got so bad that eventually a fight broke out, 300 shots were fired and a man died. Shortly after that, in 1907, a suspicious fire erupted and destroyed the Mitchel School. The school was rebuilt in the nearby town of Lenoir before again relocating in 1910 to its current location in Misenheimer.

"The people here (in Misenheimer) knew and wanted an Emily Prudden school," Hutchinson said.

The first high school diplomas were issued in 1913. Since then, the school continued to grow. It was named Pfeiffer Junior College in 1935 thanks to donations from the Pfeiffer family out of New York City. It garnered university status in 1996.

Though she had long since been out of the picture, Prudden was dismayed at the controversy that surrounded the school during its time in Caldwell County.

"She said this school was her biggest success and her biggest failure," Hutchinson said.

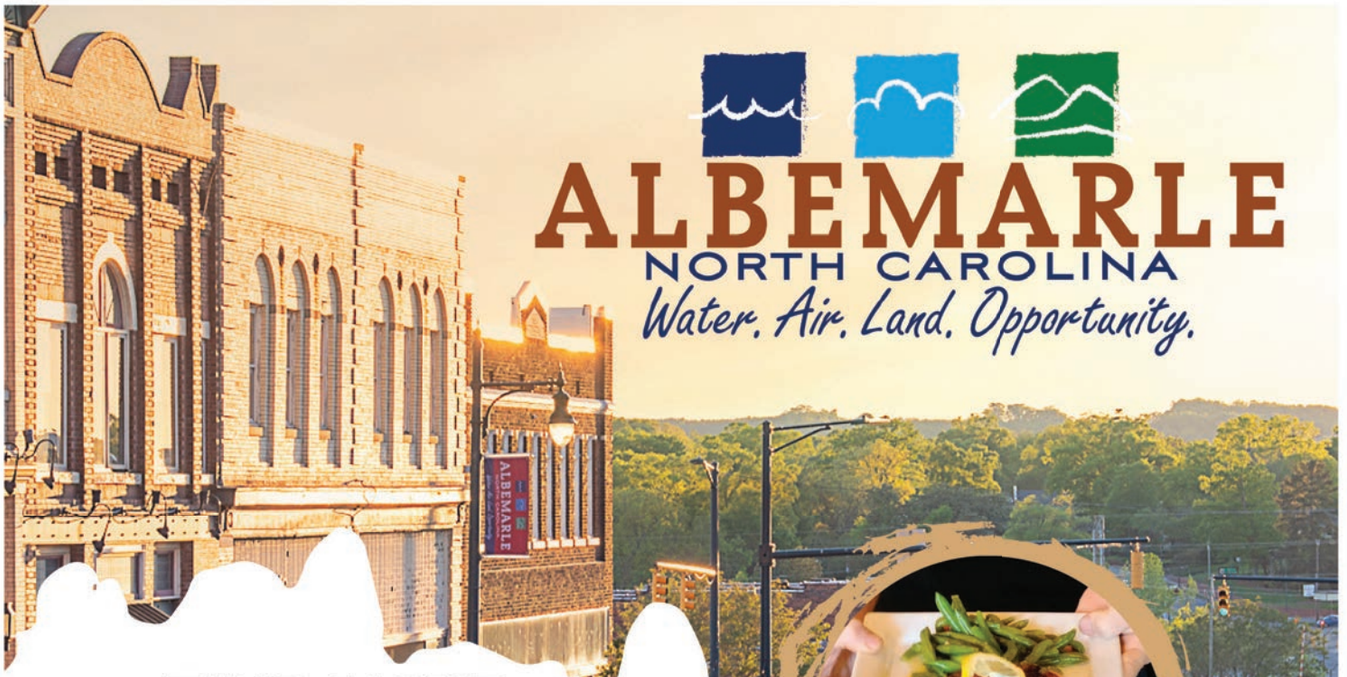
Following her work at Oberlin, Prudden spent another decade opening additional schools until she retired around 1912 at the age of 80.

"She just got to the point where she couldn't do it anymore," Hutchinson said.

Prudden died in Hickory on Christmas 1917. A woman who helped her open numerous schools escorted her body by train back to New Haven, where she was buried.

Hutchinson said Prudden's legacy is one of generosity and can be felt by the thousands of students who have been able to receive a quality education at Pfeiffer as a result of her efforts.

"She gave. She wanted people to have the same opportunities that she did," he said. ◆



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WHAT'S IN A NAME? QUITE A BIT FOR STANLY COUNTY RESIDENTS

By Chris Miller

Throughout the course of its history, Stanly County has often been spelled incorrectly, usually with people inserting an "e." Many likely have confused the county with the small town of Stanley in Gaston County.

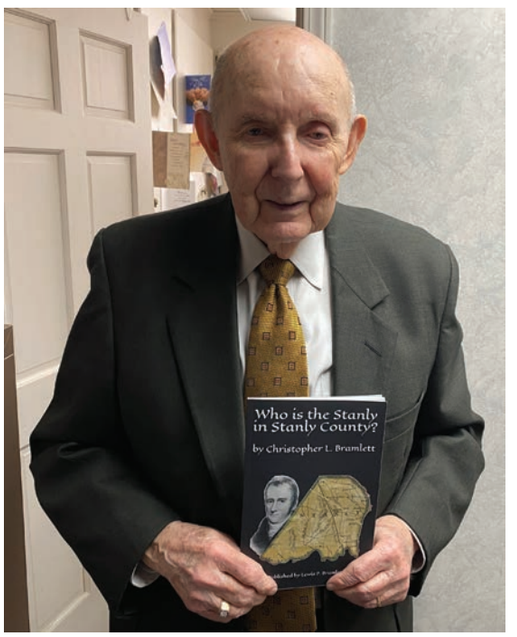
The incidents caused so much consternation for the community that in 1971, then-N.C. Rep. Lane Brown passed legislation changing the spelling of the word "Stanley" to "Stanly" in all acts referring to the county.

But just how did the county come by its unique name?

The official origins of the county date back to 1841, when Stanly County was formed from the part of Montgomery County west of the Pee Dee River. The county was named after politician John Stanly, even though Stanly never set foot in the area.

Aside from having the same name, "John Stanly had no connection with Stanly County whatsoever," according to Chris Bramlett, who wrote a book two years ago about the subject titled "Who is the Stanly in Stanly County?" He's enjoyed learning about the historical figure ever since he portrayed John Stanly for a series of events during the county's 150th anniversary several years ago.

Bramlett estimates the name "Stanly" was likely chosen as a way of ensuring the county would get approval from the state legislature in



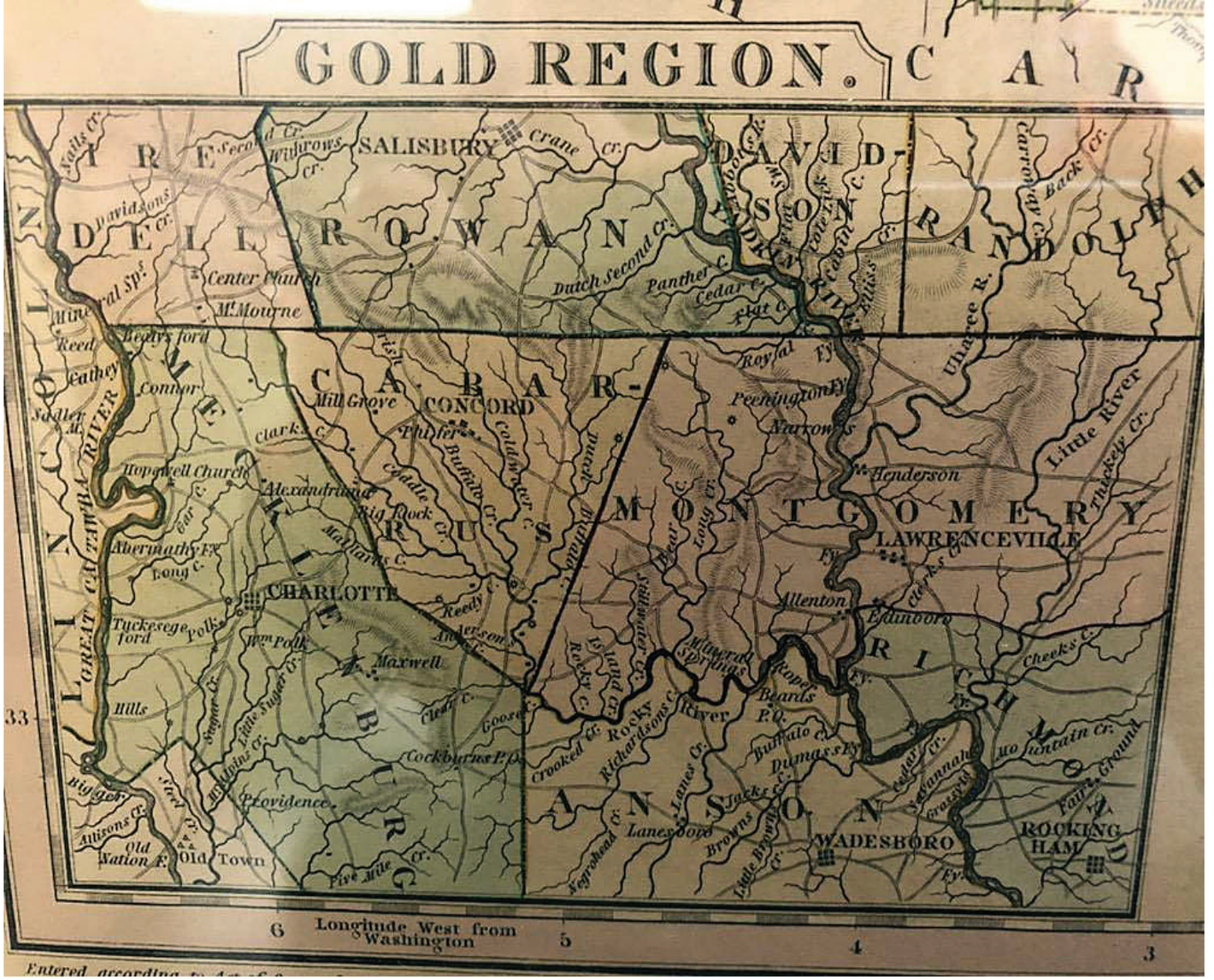
Chris Bramlett wrote a book about John Stanly and the naming of the county called "Who's is the Stanly in Stanly County?" Photo by Chris Miller

Raleigh.

But how did John Stanly, arguably one of the more color characters in North Carolina's early history, attain such prominence that even after his death, one of the state's 100 counties took his name?

Stanly was born in 1774 in New Bern, North Carolina to prominent businessman and Revolutionary War hero John Wright Stanly. According to Bramlett's research, there is a strong likelihood that the family descended from the Stanleys in England, and that at some point in his life, John Wright Stanly, who was most likely born John Stanley, dropped the "e" and added the middle name to differentiate himself from his English ancestors.

Bramlett found that another possible explanation for why John Wright Stanly dropped the "e" in his last name came from a trip he took to India during the Revolutionary War. He met a soldier by the name of Stanley and upon learning they had the same last name, the British soldier suggested they were related. John Wright Stanly did not like this and asked the man how he spelled his last



This map photo contributed by the Stanly County Museum shows what Stanly look like before it split from Montgomery County.

name. The soldier spelled it with an "e," to which point, according to Bramlett's book, Wright Stanly replied, "Oh, then we can't be kin because my name is spelled S-t-a-n-l-y."

Unlike his father, who made a name for himself in the shipping business and had a propensity for gambling, which got him repeatedly into trouble, John Stanly graduated from Princeton University and spent his career practicing law. As an ardent member of the Federalist Party, which valued a strong national government and was the country's first official political party, he also secured for himself a successful political career, serving two terms in Congress and several in the North Carolina House of Commons. He also served a stint as N.C. Speaker of the House.

The house where Stanly grew up, known today as the John Wright Stanly House, has been called one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in the South. President George Washington spent two nights at the home in 1791 and it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970.

Stanly had such a sharp legal mind that during his time in Washington, D.C., per Bramlett's book, Daniel Webster, a congressman who later served as U.S. Secretary of State for multiple presidents, introduced him to Chief Justice of the United States John Marshall with the following compliment: "As a lawyer he is your equal and my superior."

Despite his rise to prominence in state and national politics, Stanly had a nasty temper, Bramlett wrote, and he made some enemies, most notably Richard Dobbs Spaight, the eighth governor of North Carolina, and a signer of the U.S. Constitution who had represented the state in both the Continental Congress and the United States Congress. Though originally a Federalist himself, Spaight's increasing concern with states' rights led him to abandon the party and join the Democratic-Republican party.

A bitter political argument between the two men developed during the early 1800s and it became so untenable that they decided to resolve their issues the way many men did during that era: by engaging in a duel.

On Sept. 5, 1802, the two men met behind Masonic Hall in New Bern. Gunfire was exchanged three times, but neither man was hurt. On the fourth attempt, Stanly hit Spaight in the side and he died the next day.

Despite the public outcry, Gov. Benjamin Williams pardoned Stanly for the act, which became the last duel in the state, as in November the General Assembly passed a law entitled "An Act to Prevent the Vile Practice of Dueling Within This State." If someone did participate in another duel, they would be heavily fined and barred from public office; in addition, the survivor of such an exchange would be hanged "without the benefit of clergy."

The duel didn't seem to tarnish Stanly's reputation as many of his years serving in Congress and the House of Commons occurred after that fateful day in New Bern.

While serving as Speaker of the House in 1827, Stanly suffered a debilitating stroke and was never the same. He died in 1833 at the age of 59 and was buried in his hometown of New Bern. ◆

Zoua and Nhia Ly are owners of Ly Cuisine in Albemarle. (Contributed)

CUSTOMERS FEEL AT HOME EATING AT LY CUISINE

By Chris Miller

For close to two decades, Ly Cuisine in Albemarle has been about much more than just good food.

It's been a place where customers turn into friends and friends into family; a place where different cultures can be shared and appreciated; and a place that's been a mainstay in the community for so many people over the years.

"My regulars will tell you that when they come and eat at the restaurant here and when they eat my cooking, they feel that they're at my house," said owner Zoua Ly. "And I think, for me, that's a big compliment."

As someone who always enjoyed cooking, Ly decided to change career paths in the early 2000s. She had been working in the hotel industry but wanted to take a chance on herself by opening her own restaurant.

It was not an easy decision, as she had no previous professional cooking experience, but she wanted to follow her passion and introduce the community to Asian flavors, specifically Thai cuisine.

"It was very daunting," she said. "When I came up with the idea and talked with Nhia (her husband) about it, he was kind of like, 'Well, are you sure you want to do this?' and I said, 'Well, what can be so hard about it? It's just cooking and using the skills I already have to serve the public.' "

After months of research and talking with around 100 people about the prospect of a Thai

Nhia's Thai Style Steak is one of the more popular dishes at Ly Cuisine. (Contributed)

restaurant, she opened Ly Cuisine in January 2005 on North Second Street near the hospital. The business was located in a building owned by Ly's father-in-law Xang Ly, who used to operate an Asian market in the space.

The restaurant was quite a groundbreaking endeavor considering there were only a handful of Asian restaurants at the time, none of which served Thai food.

Word soon spread about the opening, to the point where lines regularly were forming outside to get in.

"We were rockin' busy," said Nhia.

Over the years, as Ly Cuisine has grown in popularity, Ly has adapted her menu as needed to include a variety of Asian flavors and dishes, including highlighting her family's Hmong roots. She and her husband Nhia are originally from Laos, a Southeast Asian country bordering Thailand and Vietnam.

> "When we first started, it was strictly a Thai restaurant, but through the years, as we advanced in our knowledge of running a restaurant, we mixed it together — it's more Asian fusion you can say right now."
>
> - Nhia Ly, Ly Cuisine

"When we first started, it was strictly a Thai restaurant, but through the years, as we advanced in our knowledge of running a restaurant, we mixed it together — it's more Asian fusion you can say right now," Nhia said.

Though the menu is quite extensive, some of the restaurant's most popular dishes include classics such as pad thai, curry noodle and spring rolls along with others like scorpion chicken and thai style steak, which is only offered Friday and Saturday.

"We've had customers tell us that we have one of the best steaks hands down compared to other expensive steak restaurants," Ly said.

As Ly's gotten to know many of her stalwart customers — some of whom stop by at least once a week — she's learned to customize dishes to their liking. Several items on the menu — such as Cody's Chicken, which is sliced chicken sautéed in oyster and teriyaki sauce — are named for customers who first suggested the idea.

"I'm in the business of relationships and it's relationships through my cooking," Ly said. "Through the years, I've gotten to know my customers and I've

received feedback from them and what they would like. A lot of my cooking styles and dishes are really influenced by my customers."

One of Ly Cuisine's more high-profile customers over the years has been Kellie Pickler, who regularly frequented the restaurant before finding success on "American Idol." Even after she became famous, Pickler would call ahead to schedule private dinners whenever she was in town. To this day, Picker occasionally messages the family on Facebook, Ly said, "just to see how we're doing."

The restaurant has gained a reputation for authentic Asian cuisine that extends beyond the borders of Stanly County. People from all across the country, including Ly's relatives in California and parts of the Midwest, have come to enjoy the flavors offered up by Ly and her staff.

"We're a small restaurant in a small town yet someone from California or New York knows about us," Ly said. "It's pretty amazing."

In cultivating relationships with so many customers, many of whom Ly now refers to as her "family," several striking moments come to mind. Ly remembers speaking with an elderly woman who had avoided ethnic cuisine for most of her life before her daughter convinced her to eat at Ly Cuisine.

"She said, 'Zoua, I'm so glad that my daughter encouraged me to try your food. Because had my daughter not, I would never know what I had been missing all these years," Ly recalled.

After the woman, who became a regular patron, passed away, her daughter told Ly what the restaurant had meant to her mother.

"Thank you for cooking for my parents," Ly said the daughter told her. "You don't know the joy that you gave them."

It's those kind of special, intimate moments that Ly says she treasures the most.

"When customers tell me that, that's my legacy. I'm grateful for that." ◆

YMCA RENOVATES, ADJUSTS DURING PANDEMIC

By Chris Miller

Since the pandemic began locally in March 2020 the Stanly County Family YMCA has had to adjust and make changes, but its core mission of providing a place of community for people to come together remains as tight as ever.

"We continually try to make this community better," said CEO George Crooker. "We're here to help."

MAKING IMPROVEMENTS

A key part of assisting the community is through improving the YMCA facility, which has been around for more than 70 years. Beginning with the renovation of the C.B. Crook Pavilion, much of which took place before the pandemic, the Y has been working on several projects to improve various aspects of its building.

"We've been doing some renovations this whole year pretty much," Crooker said in late 2021. "When you have a building that was originally built in 1950 and added on to in the early 1990s, that's a lot of years and a lot of people coming through."

New lighting has been installed in both pools and the gymnasium and new flooring has been installed in four locker rooms and the warm pool. (The cold pool had new flooring installed in 2020). The adult lockers were also all refurbished.

There have also been new basketball goals installed in the gym. They can be lowered to eight feet, "so when little kids play, they can shoot correctly," Crooker said.

The YMCA is also expecting new cardio and weight equipment to arrive in the coming weeks.

With its operating budget more limited than in years past,

> "We need a plan of what we're going to do to continue to be relevant and help people. We just want to be the best we can to serve people and have top-notch facilities."
>
> - George Crooker, CEO, Stanly County Family YMCA

Spinning is a popular class at the YMCA. (Contributed)

many of the renovation projects were completed thanks to donations from people in the community and through grants.

Crooker has several big planned projects for this year, but he could not go into specifics. He also mentioned the YMCA is revamping its strategic plan, which has not been updated since before the pandemic.

"We need a plan of what we're going to do to continue to be relevant and help people," he said. "We just want to be the best we can to serve people and have top-notch facilities."

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

The YMCA is still going strong, despite the many obstacles that have surfaced over the past two years with COVID.

Foot traffic is about 70 percent of what it used to be before 2020, but that is actually better than most other YMCA facilities across the state, Crooker said.

Since the pandemic began, staffing has been reduced by at least a third, but it has not deterred employees from carrying out their duties.

"The strain on our staff has been tremendous yet they have performed like troopers," Crooker said, referring to them as "servant leaders."

To keep people as safe as possible, the facility is sanitized around the clock and deep cleaning takes place several times a week.

Despite the many challenges, the YMCA continues to serve the public, in whatever way possible. One example is that scholarships are available to make sure everyone can afford the services.

"What we do here is serve, plain and simple," Crooker said. "We have to take the variables that we can't control, and try and put them into something that we can, just like everybody else."◆

YOUTH ARTS ORGANIZATION SHOWS TALENT

By Chris Miller

Jordi Coats was with a few of her friends backstage during the Uwharrie Players' production of "South Pacific" in 2005 when they came up with a rather audacious idea. Channeling their passion for musical theater, they wanted to create a platform where young people like themselves could put on and star in their own productions.

"We were all young and excited and we wanted to do something where we were in charge and we were calling the shots and we were the leads in the shows," Coats recalls.

After much planning, Coats, along with Staley Story, Rebekah Asycue and Kristen Throneburg, put together a musical review of "Wicked" at First Presbyterian Church in downtown Albemarle to a crowd of more than 200 people, singing classics such as "Defying Gravity" and "The Wizard and I."

Jake Sessions portrays Albert Peterson in "Bye Bye Birdie." He is joined by Mariah Helms, left, and Rachel Moon. (Contributed)

This, Coats said, was the beginning of the Talent Company.

Enough money was raised from the performance that TC was able to organize its first official production of "Cinderella" a year later — and the group has not looked back.

TC is set to perform "Annie," it's 30th production, in the spring of 2022.

Since TC was founded 17 years ago, it has evolved into a cultural influence in the community as hundreds, if not thousands, of young people have gained experience performing on stage and participating in all the key parts of a musical production, including direction, set design, choreography, sound and lighting design.

"I can't even believe the beast that it's grown into," said Coats, 33, who directs and produces shows, including cabaret, in New York City. "I'm so humbled and blown away."

Laura Almond has spent the better part of the last decade involved with TC. Aside from her position on the executive board, where she serves as treasurer, Almond knows all too well just how important the Talent Company has been for so many young children across the county.

Her 16-year-old daughter Reagan spent eight years with the organization, beginning with her role as an ensemble player in "Aladdin Jr.," where she developed confidence and a love for the performing arts. Her experience has served her well. She is now enrolled at the North Carolina School of the Arts, where she is studying opera.

No matter how major or minor a position, every member of the group is needed to make sure each production runs smoothly.

"That's what I've always loved when I started getting involved in the Talent Company, is everyone feels valued," Almond said. "It doesn't matter what your role is, you truly feel that you use whatever talent you can to contribute."

The organization provides members, who range in age from 8 to 18, with real-world experience such as how to handle adversity, deal with pressure and work as a team.

Grace Dombrowski performed as Rosie Alvarez in "Bye Bye Birdie." She is joined by Sam Phibbs, left, and Stephen Faryadi. (Contributed)

"It's like a family because in order to put a show together it's absolutely true teamwork," Almond said. "You're only as strong as your weakest so you learn to truly push each other and help each other."

Many TC alumni still play key roles within the group.

Kate White, 2022 Miss Stanly County, grew up performing in productions, most notably as Jo March in TC's 2019 production of "Little Women." She is currently serving on the group's executive board. She also helped mentor some of the cast in last year's "The Little Mermaid Jr."

Her first recollection of what it was like on the stage came when she was in the fifth grade and had a small speaking role in "Schoolhouse Rock."

"That was a fond memory of mine because it was my very first time being on a stage…and it was the first time I had to say something by myself," she said.

White credits her tenure with TC with helping to instill in her the confidence to compete in the Miss Stanly County Scholarship Competition last fall.

"It truly did give me such an advantage in learning how to speak in front of an audience and to just be comfortable not only being myself but having to memorize things and think on the spot in front of an audience," she said.

Cassidy Stoner, who was in eight productions during her tenure, including as The Cat in the Hat in the musical "Seussical," and directed "Schoolhouse Rock" as a senior at Gray Stone Day School, sees a direct connection from her time with TC to her career now as a Broadway performer.

"I would not be doing musical theater if it weren't for my time at the Talent Company," said Stoner, a close friend of Coats.

As someone who was not exposed to the performing arts in school, TC was a way for Stoner to meet like-minded people who also enjoyed performing.

"It was really, really special to be able to come together and play and put on these shows with people who became my best friends," she said.

While bigger cities likely have similar student-focused arts organizations, Stoner said, it certainly is less common to find such a robust program in a small rural community like Stanly — which makes it all the more valuable.

"It is rare and special that it was able to come about," she said.

Like many alumni, Coats, 33, still enjoys catching shows whenever she's in town. And each time, no matter the production, she finds herself filled with emotion.

"I'm grateful to have been able to touch it at all," she said. "What a cool thing." ◆

FORE!
TWO COURSES CONTINUE COUNTY'S GOLFING LEGACY

By Charles Curcio

From the days of the Stanly County Country Club and Mountain Brook Golf Course to the current courses and forms, golf has experienced a boom in recent years.

The sport which developed on the links in Scotland is still played today on the courses of Piney Point and Red Bridge.

Piney Point Golf Club, at 48688 Piney Point Road, Norwood, offers the traditional golfing experience with many new features.

The course was constructed in 1964 as part of a federal grant program which allowed towns with populations of 2,500 or smaller to turn farmland into recreational areas. Local leaders, including Kermit L. Young and Robert L. Isenhour, helped lead a group to se-

Paul Childress putts at Piney Point Golf Club during a Stanly County Chamber of Commerce tournament. Photos by Charles Curcio

Wil Huneycutt attempts a putt at Piney Point Golf Club.

Dave VanDeventer, the head golf pro at Piney Point Golf Club, has worked at the club for nearly 40 years.

cure memberships and the loans necessary to build the club.

Charlotte's J. Porter Gibson designed the Piney Point course on 165 acres of land for 375 charter members to enjoy. The club included a swimming pool.

"Basically, (Piney Point) was creating recreational activity for the people in the community at a reasonable price, and I think we've tried to do that ever since," head golf pro Dave VanDeventer said.

Today, the greens have been updated twice, and are considered one of the club's best features on the golf side. Updated last in 2016, the hybrid grass Bermuda greens provide a quality surface for play throughout the year.

VanDeventer, who next year will celebrate 40 years of working at Piney Point, said the golf course is player-friendly.

"You can hit it and find it for the most part, and golfers like that," VanDeventer said. "Players can spray (the ball) from one fairway to another and still find it."

Piney Point's pro also said most golfers can hit the driver on more holes on the Norwood course than others in the area.

Membership for the club is around 280, but the semi-private course gets a number of players from the surrounding counties.

Piney Point also has a number of youth programs including a junior PGA team which competes in tournaments over the summer months against teams from other area courses.

The clubhouse at Piney Point features a snack bar with hot grilled items and a fully stocked pro shop.

Red Bridge Golf Club is the newest of the county's golf courses and offers a true golf challenge to golfers of all skill levels.

The property, at 6801 Gatehouse Road in Locust, stretches across the Stanly and Cabarrus county borders. It is only 25 minutes away from downtown Charlotte via the four-lane N.C. Highway 24-27.

With a length of more than 6,700 yards, ending with an 18th hole which plays 639 yards from the black tees, Red Bridge gives golfers a scenic experience and a challenge to tee it high and let it fly.

The course was designed by a David Postlethwait, a protégé of famed designer Pete Dye, in 2009.

Mark Davis, general manager for Red Bridge, said the course is not nearly as long as many modern championships courses.

"It's a good test of golf," he said. "I would rate it as a harder golf course than most for sure."

Some of the holes, Davis said, require placement off the tee, so the course can play longer than its actual yardage.

Davis said the course has a unique topography and has plenty of elevation changes, but what sets it apart from other courses are the greens.

"(The greens) are very defined and undulated, and our green speeds are good," Davis said.

The semi-private course's location has benefited from the four-lane road to Charlotte, according to Davis. The course gets many golfers from Stanly and Cabarrus during the week and the traffic from Mecklenburg picks up on weekends. ◆

Thank You!

We would like to take this opportunity to say Thank You for being with us for the past few years during these challenging times. We have been here for 142 years and hope to be here for 142 more. We sincerely appreciate our subscribers, advertisers and readers. Thank You for Your Continued Support

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ALBEMARLE'S DOWNTOWN IS LOOKING UP

By Chris Miller

For many municipalities, the downtown area is its lifeblood and heartbeat; it's often where the best restaurants and shops are located as well as important government centers. There's usually a dynamic and exciting energy that's unmatched anywhere else in the city.

While Norwood and Oakboro have steadily been improving their downtowns and the Locust Town Center continues to see new development, the area that has been improving the most over the past few years has been downtown Albemarle.

There has been a renewed optimism surrounding the downtown following the construction of Pfeiffer University's Center for Health Sciences two years ago. To accommodate an influx of young medical professionals, several housing projects are underway. 1st on Main Luxury Apartments, at the corner of North First Street and Main Street, is starting to lease space while pre-leasing for The Residences at the Albemarle Hotel should begin later this year.

"Probably the biggest game changer to our downtown is the residential projects that are getting close to coming to fruition," Main Street Manager/Albemarle Downtown Development Corporation Director Joy Almond said. "I think getting residents living in the heart of our downtown is going to be huge."

Over the past year, several new businesses catering to a younger clientele have also opened, including the tap house Badin Brews and The Tomahawk Throwing Range & Blade Shop. A new craft beer startup company, Uwharrie Brewing, is set to open in the former fire station behind City Hall in late spring.

Garrett Starnes, who lives in

(Contributed)

1st on Main Luxury Apartments are one of the many new residential options happening in downtown Albemarle. Photo by My Different Perspective

the area and opened Tomahawk last September, is proud of his decision to invest in the community, saying residents have been yearning for unique activities and things to do at night.

"It's been great, it's really exceeded expectations," he said. "For the most part, each month seems to do better than the last."

Other key businesses which continue to make the downtown a popular destination include Five Points Public House, Off The Square, Goody Shop Cafe and Tiffany's at the Boardroom, to name a few.

"You want a complete downtown where there's a little bit of something for everybody," City Manager Michael Ferris said. "You want that vibrancy within your downtown because that's your sense of identity within your community....It just subconsciously gives you that feel that this is the place to be, there's something happening here."

The city recently installed new directional signs throughout the downtown as part of its wayfinding project, making the area more accessible to the public, especially visitors.

Albemarle has also partnered with Downtown Strategies, a division of the Alabama-based marketing firm Retail Strategies, to help strengthen and revitalize the area. Officials with Downtown Strategies conducted a strategic visioning workshop in December, where they collected information regarding the needs and wants of various business owners, building owners and relevant stakeholders, to figure out how best to market the area.

"What we're hoping Retail Strategies can do is to help make the connections with potential entrepreneurs and small business owners and provide them with the data and the information to help them understand what the needs are within the downtown," Ferris said.

One of the long-standing crown jewels has been Starnes Jewelers, which has resided in its current location on Main Street for more than a century and has served patrons from across the country. Owned and operate by three generations of Starnes men, the venerable business is set to close its doors in the coming months.

"It's the hardest decision I have ever made in my life because it's not what I want to do," owner Gene Starnes said. "But health-wise and age-wise and everything, I think it's what I need to do. It's time."

While not closing down, the Albemarle Sweet Shop, another legacy property that has been around for more than 100 years, is also undergoing a huge transition: It will be moving from its King Street location to a new building at 310 S. Second Street later this year. Construction should begin within the next few months, with the goal of moving into the new space by September.

"We've just got to the point where we just physically can't keep up with the demand with the facility we've got," owner Shawn Oke said, adding that with the growth the city is experiencing around the downtown area, "I just think it's an opportune time to look at what we're doing."

While these types of changes are simply part of the naturally occurring life cycle every business eventually has to deal with, Ferris is confident and excited about the future.

"There could be something that's just starting up today, next week or a few months from now that's going to be the next legacy business for downtown Albemarle and our community," he said. "I'm just really proud and happy with what's taken place and look forward to more successes and supporting people and businesses of Albemarle to be the best they can be." ◆

OAKBORO STILL THE GO-TO FOR THE FOURTH

By Charles Curcio

What started as a fundraiser for a new truck turned into an annual holiday tradition for many in Stanly County.

The modern Oakboro Fourth of July celebration traces its roots back well before the current event's first year in 1958.

Oakboro hosted various activities from 1931 to 1941, celebrating the birth of America, but the current event came years later.

In 1958, Oakboro had a theater named Little's Theater, which burned down in part because the town's fire truck would not start and had rotted hoses.

Needing $8,000 for a new truck, the town's leaders decided to host a Miss Oakboro pageant, with votes at one cent each going towards the fundraising efforts. There was also a raffle for a new 1958 Rambler American car, which Jean Little won.

Rides, food, concessions along with horse and pony shows highlighted the first event, which largely has remained the same all these years.

Only twice has the Oakboro Fourth not taken place. In 1973, a carnival suitable for the event could not be found, while the other time came just two years ago in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In early years, traveling "medicine shows" could be found at the event along with local bluegrass pickers. Many times, people came up with their own concessions to sell, or built their own Ferris wheel.

Mule races down Main Street took place often early on as well in lieu of a parade.

Farmers would work extra hard in the fields the day before to be able to spend the whole day of the Fourth celebrating.

Many times, the festivities only took place in the daylight. Now, the Ferris wheel, Graviton and other rides can operate deep into a hot July evening.

Since its inception, the event has expanded to a six-day celebration. The annual events and features include the Miss Stanly Fire Queen Pageant, the Little Miss Fourth of July Pageant, free nightly concerts on the stage (bring a lawn chair), rides on the midway, concessions and the Fourth of July parade.

Attendees at the week-long festivities can be found from all parts of the county and beyond.

Doris Huneycutt leads the Oakboro School Band in the 1958 parade. Debbie Rogers and Carol Coble are in hats. Majorettes are Carolyn Morton, Peggy Tucker, Jane Hatley, Jane Ellen Barbee and Catherine Huneycutt. (Contributed)

Mayor R.C. Hatley, in a white dinner jacket, is on stage leaning on the podium 1958. (Contributed)

Halee Davis crowns Addison Eury, representing West Stanly Fire Department, as the 2021 Miss Oakboro Fourth of July Fire Queen. File photo

Pictured, standing from left: Monroe Garland Sr., Alexander, Leroy, Aaron and William Franco; seated: Lula and Portia. (Contributed)

FAMILY-OWNED KELSEY FUNERAL HOME HAS BEEN SERVING COMMUNITY FOR ALMOST 80 YEARS

By Chris Miller

While dealing with death is often a difficult and painful experience for people, what can make it a little easier is knowing that rituals such as a funeral and memorial services have been properly arranged to allow families and friends ample space for grief, comfort and love.

That's why organizations like Kelsey Funeral Home, which has been a mainstay in the county for so many families over its almost 80 years, are so valuable. On average, it provides service to around 65 to 70 families a year. Even during the pandemic, the numbers have more or less remained the same.

As a Black-owned business, the funeral home has been an especially important resource for African-Americans and other minority families in the community.

"Families know us and they know that we are community-oriented," said funeral home president Murvyn Kelsey, who has been in charge of the business with her husband Monroe for more than a decade. "Supporting families not only in times of grief but throughout the years has contributed to the longevity of one of the county's oldest businesses."

Among other things, employees at Kelsey have delivered meals during the holiday season, helped with voter registration drives, assisted the local police, served as coaches for sports teams and supported the Back to School supply drive for the E.E. Waddell Community Center.

"Over the years, they have had a big impact on my family and have done whatever they could to help the family," said Albemarle

Kelsey Funeral Home has been in Albemarle for close to 80 years. Photo by Chris Miller

resident Pat Pergee, noting the funeral home made arrangements following the passing of her grandparents, parents and two brothers. "They were good and very supportive."

Even though operating a business centered around death can be difficult, Kelsey said she most enjoys meeting people and working with families to make sure their deceased loved ones are honored and treated with dignity and respect.

"Anything that I can do to just make their life just a little bit lighter and just to show them that compassion," she said.

The legacy of the funeral home dates back near the beginning of the 20th century when Stephen Noble and William F. Kelsey established Noble and Kelsey Funeral Home in Salisbury in 1901. Kelsey's wife Lula Spaulding Kelsey played a key role as she was the first licensed funeral director and embalmer in the state.

"She was quite the business lady," Murvyn Kelsey said.

After two of her sons finished embalming school in Ohio, Leroy Kelsey opened a funeral home in Concord and, in 1943, his brother William Kelsey started the Albemarle location.

Since the Albemarle business opened, at least one member of the Kelsey family has continuously been at the helm, operating the business through the past seven decades.

William Kelsey and his wife Margaret ran the funeral home for about 40 years until his death in 1974. Following his passing, Margaret and his brother M. Garland Kelsey, Murvyn's father-in-law, operated the funeral home until her death in 1992 and his death a year later.

After that, Timmie White Sr., a licensed funeral operator, maintained the business with Fannye Kelsey, Garland's widow, until his death in 2008. Upon Fannye's

Murvyn Kelsey is president of Kelsey Funeral Home. Photo by Chris Miller

retirement a year later, Monroe Kelsey and his wife Murvyn took over and have been operating the funeral home ever since.

Though Murvyn did not grow up in North Carolina, she also had a background in the business. Her father owned a funeral home in Georgia and had known about the Kelsey family as he had met William Kelsey at a mortician convention.

Once she got a job working as a claims representative in Albemarle, fresh out of college, she recalled her father telling her "whenever you get in North Carolina, look up Kelsey's." She soon established a connection with the family, especially Margaret Kelsey, whom she referred to as a "surrogate mother," and ended up marrying Margaret's nephew Monroe.

After about 35 years of working in the federal government, Murvyn went to funeral service school and received her mortician certification to help her husband take over the the family business.

The funeral home continues to be a family affair as Murvyn Kelsey's son, Monroe Kelsey III, serves as treasurer and has worked there since 2010. The hope is that one day, once his parents retire, the 36-year-old Kelsey will take over. He already has his Funeral Service degree from Fayetteville Technical Community College and is preparing to take his state boards so he can become a licensed funeral home director.

He's proud of his family legacy of providing a service to the community for almost 80 years and looks to continue the tradition.

"You have some businesses that don't even make it 10 or 15 years, so the fact that we've been able to be here for this long, it shows we're doing something right," Kelsey III said. "Hopefully the community will continue to support us and hopefully we can make them proud." ◆

A view of Uwharrie Bank's Norwood branch. (Contributed)

NEARLY 40 YEARS LATER, UWHARRIE CONTINUES MISSION TO FULFILL VISION OF FOUNDERS

By Toby Thorpe

In 1983, Albemarle businessmen Roger Dick and Leonard Mabry set out to establish a locally-owned and operated financial institution which would, according to Dick, "enable our citizens to have a way to create their own future."

Established as Bank of Stanly in early 1984 and headquartered in Albemarle, a rotating board made up of local citizens that Dick, the current CEO, described as "folks from all walks of life," was set up to govern the fledgling institution.

According to Dick, the early years saw some "bumps and struggles," yet the bank managed to grow and thrive through economic lows and highs, success the CEO credits to the strong leadership provided by its board.

Roger Dick

"Our governing body understood the community," he said. "It was not made up solely of wealthy people. We had businessmen and executives on the board, but we also had factory workers, school teachers and farmers, people who were respected in their communities."

Thirty-eight years later, Bank of Stanly is now Uwharrie Bank/Uwharrie Capital, having adopted the more regional moniker upon its 2013 merger with Cabarrus Bank and Trust and Anson Bank and Trust. From its original single location in Albemarle, the organization has expanded to include branches in Charlotte, Concord, Locust, Mt. Pleasant, Norwood, Oakboro and Wadesboro. And after showing a little over $15 million in ending assets in 1985, the organization now is approaching holdings of $1 billion, and provides roughly 200 jobs to people in the area.

Dick quickly added, however, that the growth in profits has never been the institution's primary goal.

"It's not about the money," he said. "Our purpose is that of bringing a controlled economic

future to our shareholders ... not to put profits before people."

To further illustrate Uwharrie's mission, Dick tells "the hot dog story," an anecdote he uses often.

"There were two people who decided to go into the hot dog business," he said. "One's goal was to make a million dollars selling hot dogs. The other's goal was to make and sell the best hot dog possible — to use the best bread, chili, meat and condiments, and to have friendly folks serving them.

"But, after a while in business, the person with the million-dollar goal went broke. Meanwhile the person whose goal was to serve the best hot dog possible thrived, and ended up making two million dollars.

"So, while profit is important, it's just our report card, not our entire purpose," he concluded. "We think it's important not to confuse purpose with the measurement of what we are trying to accomplish."

Maintaining Uwharrie as a community banking institution was also a major goal, said Dick, so the board set a limit on how much stock any one person could hold.

"No one was allowed to purchase more than one percent of the total stock," he recalled.

And in the spirit of a community organization, Uwharrie has supported community causes, events and organizations since its inception.

"Each year we have identified a keyword to describe our passion," said Dick, "and this year the word is 'gratitude' — grateful that God has blessed us, that the community has supported us, that we have been able to attract and accumulate a group of very talented people on our staff, and that we have been able to give back to the community."

Pertinent to the final point, the CEO pointed out that Uwharrie has given more than $1 million back to nonprofits in its service area in the past year, while crediting the shareholders and customers in the communities.

"The people made it happen," he said. "They should commend themselves."

> "It's not about the money. Our purpose is that of bringing a controlled economic future to our shareholders ... not to put profits before people."
>
> - Roger Dick, CEO, Uwharrie Bank

In 37 years, Uwharrie has persevered through a number of economic downturns, the first of which began soon after the bank's inception.

"In the early 80s, we were still a strong manufacturing community," Dick recalled, "and watching the painful transition — not just in our community, but in all rural communities as manufacturing jobs went away, the economic challenges caused by globalization, plus trying to figure out how the bank can help the community make that transition to a new economy ... that was tough."

In such times, banks can be a "magic engine" for economic change.

"Banks 'create' money by way of the reserve principle," Dick said. "You can take a dollar of local capital, and through the 'reserve principle,' we can lend out 90 cents. So, if that one dollar of local capital got re-deposited in a local bank it can create 10 to 12 dollars of local wealth just through the regeneration process that is banking."

And recent developments have led the CEO to see a spirit of optimism for the local economy.

"It's good to see what's happening all over Stanly County," said Dick, citing examples such as the relocation of Charlotte Pipe to western Stanly, the "Pfeiffer effect" in downtown Albemarle and Juneberry Ridge to the south.

"It feels for the moment like we are on the upside of a new era of prosperity; as we are seeing local jobs created, leading to opportunities for our young people to either come back home or stay home," he said.

Dick also expressed excitement over Uwharrie's role in the renovation of the Albemarle Hotel.

"That was Leonard Mabry's dream," he said.

Mabry, whom Dick described as "my mentor in banking," was particularly interested in saving both the Albemarle Hotel and the Alameda Theater.

"He (Mabry) was big into the history of those buildings," he said.

Brooke Senter, senior vice president, shared the same excitement expressed by Dick.

"I'm thankful to have had the opportunity to grow up here, and to raise my two children here," she said. "I've worked downtown for 20 years now, and it's special to see prosperity and life coming back to the downtown, and to know that we have played a role in it."

Dick noted that while the downtown revival in Albemarle is exciting, Uwharrie remains committed to all the towns it serves.

"We're excited not just about Albemarle," he said. "Our mission is bigger than that ... we are Stanly County.

"We try to participate in all the municipalities and wherever there is a need, we try to do something to help. And this is made possible here by people participating, people working together for a common vision and philosophy, and making a difference," said Dick. "The congratulations goes to the people of the communities we serve." ◆

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