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On the cover:

Hannah Crump puts the latest fashions offered by Cache Noir on the clothing racks. (*Photo by Charles Curcio/staff*)

He gets his music online.

His t-shirts at the mall

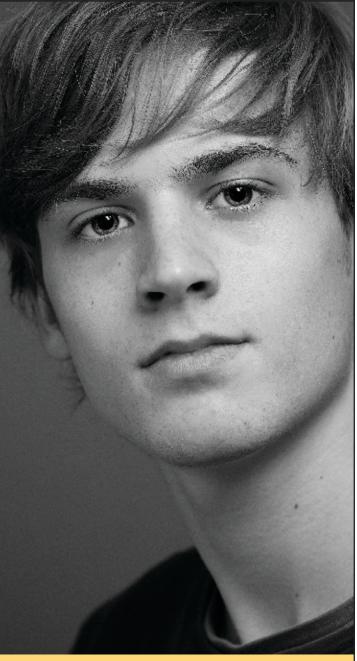
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Spreading the word

Social media a key component for boutiques

BY CHARLES CURCIO

usinesses in 2023 depend greatly on the power of social media for connecting with the community.

Stanly County has many local businesses which do more than just sell goods online. Many people have become local influencers and content creators for social media, marketing products but also building a following to promote their ideas and change the way companies and people think.

LIVI BUG'S

In the case of Olivia Phillips, before she had a store in Albemarle, her presence on social media built a community. It has grown exponentially since 2019.

Phillips started posting her outfits daily on Instagram, which helped build a community of followers.

"It's a never-ending building that people are trying to grow and reach the community," Phillips said. "I feel like being consistent and actually forming meaningful relationships with people—that's what's helped me to stay and grow at the number I am."

The amount of followers, she added, both on her online brand, theoliviaphillips, and the boutique, are not as important as interactions with followers. Interactions like direct messages, comments on posts, clicks on links and such are what companies notice now, but early on, she added, it was about the follower numbers.

"You can grow (followers) but not have engagements or people interested in what you are talking about or promoting," Phillips said. "It's much more important to have an actual community and engagement."

She said being a content creator is like having a full-time job in addition to running a small business.

"On my weekends when the store is closed, I devote almost an eight-hour day to film con-



Olivia Phillips, owner of Livi Bug's Boutique. Photo by Dylan Furtano/@dylaninthedetails



tent for the week," Phillips said, which is called batching.

She gets help from her husband or uses a tripod to film outfits, then posts those throughout the week.

But creating content, she added, also means interacting with followers, answering messages, responding to comments and writing captions with some thought.

"It takes a lot of time and effort, for sure," Phillips said.

Online efforts, she said, are less professionally curated these days, with people trying to make food, fashion and more look perfect every time.

"In the last year, I have really seen a huge change. People want more unfiltered media content. It's more about the videos," Phillips said.

Those videos are usually shorter for online apps like Instagram Reels and TikTok.

"People want to see more of your everyday life. I've shifted from an outfit of the day that is polished to get ready with me videos, daily Melissa Parraquet and her husband own Cache Noir in Norwood. Photo by Charles Curcio.

blogs — the unedited, normal side of your life," Phillips said.

Sharing part of one's personal life, however, can be invasive, but it is up to the content creator to draw the line.

"I share as much as I'm comfortable with," Phillips said. "If you ever have those times when people are asking questions or sending you DMs, wanting to know more and it's crossing the line, it's up to you to cut that off and only share what you want."

She said she is always genuine in what she posts on social media.

"It takes that follower following you for a little length of time to grow to understand you and realize who you are."

Products she promotes online are only ones she likes or feels "like I truly would spend my own money on."

"It's easy to see an influencer share something and you're like, 'Well, of course they like it. They got it for free.' It's important to me to be upfront and honest."

Phillips has several brands with whom she has worked, including three years with Aerie and two years with Ulla Pumpkin.

"When you have that longer lasting relationship, I feel it goes further. It helps the brand and the influencer more. I feel like my followers know and trust that brand as well. I prefer that to one-offs," Phillips said.

She said companies love getting the feedback from her followers and will engage with their feedback. Any negative feedback, she said, as a plus-size fashion content creator, usually deals with inclusive sizing.

Good or bad feedback, Phillips said, all goes back to the companies with whom she works. She said she feels a responsibility to her followers to report their feelings back to companies.



Summer Hahn, left, and Taylor Burleson style the hair of Taylor Bell. Photo by Charles Curcio.

Cache Noir

end fashion

by Charles

Curcio.

boutique. Photo

is a high-



Phillips said she sees herself continuing to develop the Albemarle store, her "happy place," as well as growing her online community.

"I'm really proud of the relationships I have with people."

CACHE NOIR

Melissa Parraquet and her husband own Cache Noir, a brick and mortar business in Norwood which began five years ago when they moved to Lake Tillery.

A high-end fashion boutique, Parraquet said the business got started in part because she

liked to shop, but stores were at least an hour away.

Her husband suggested she open a boutique after having spent 22 years as a technician for an ophthalmologist.

However, she was tenuous about opening the store because she said she "could not see anybody in Norwood wanting to spend the amount of money for clothes that I like to carry."

What started as four racks and a table has grown in three years to 1,500 square feet and a business which communicates with customers via social media.

Doing business on Facebook and Instagram, Cache Noir sells and ships women's fashion products to as far away as California and Washington.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how people shopped, Parraquet said, so many shoppers are used to buying from her store online. However, she said, the store gets a lot of in-person traffic from vacation home owners on the lake.

"I've got a customer base now, but it has been pretty consistent from the beginning,"



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Parraquet said.

Having Reservoir Coffee in the back of the store also has helped build the community around her store, which she said "feels like I have a home, some roots in Norwood."

Like other local influencers, Parraquet said social media marketing "is a whole other job which comes with the store."

She tries to form her content, she added, to be the kind of posts which she is interested when scrolling social media.

Helping her create social media content, along with running the store, is Hannah Crump, who said she has learned so much working at Cache Noir.

"To know Melissa is to love her. Everybody in this town absolutely loves her. She's been one of the biggest influences on me," Crump said. "I have met so many people through her. I've seen the town grow, with her, with Robin (Davis) and the building."

Having regular content as well, with a story or outfit of the day, gives people a reason to seek out her content.

"They watch it on purpose. So a lot of times I don't have to necessarily have to get new ideas. I explain what and how I wear, different ways I can wear it," Parraquet said.

Cache Noir does not reach out to brands to feature them on social media, she added.

"I stay with the ones that I wear, that I wore before, that last."

She also said she has not tried to branch out and get more customers because "it's just still me and it's busy enough keeping me busy with doing (online) stories every day."

Parraquet said she does not order anything for the store with which she is not familiar, adding the products she sells have to have three basic components.

"It has to be soft, comfort wise. It has to be durable and it has to be able to be washed in the washing machine," Parraquet said.

Her fashions run more expensive than some, she added, because they are nicer quality and meant to be worn longer than one year.

"That's what the customers like about my stories because they are getting a quality piece no one else has," Parraquet said.

Many times she has had to leave her store wearing a different outfit because someone wanted what she was wearing.



Olivia Phillips has built up her online following. Photo by Dylan Furtano/@dylaninthedetails

"It happens all the time. (Customers) know and are like, 'Is that the last one?' And I'm like, 'Seriously, people?' "she said.

Quite often, she said, she will see people by appointment as well at the store, and items not even listed online get out to people by word of mouth.

Cache Noir has customers ages 15 to 75, she added, and many think it's more trendy.

Crump said she has learned how to deal with customers from Parraquet's example, asking what would Melissa do?

"I see myself here always. I don't intend to go...I've been here three years in May and I love it."

Social media, Crump said, plays a huge role in the success of the boutique.

"We have reached so many people that way. It's convenient," Crump said.

The style of the fashions offered by Cache Noir, Parraquet said, will not change.

"My style is classic. It doesn't change. Anything you get in my store today, you could have gotten two years ago and two years from now."

THE RIGHT CUTS

Influencing one's business online, though, does not necessarily entail selling products online.

In the case of the Hair Unlimited Beauty Saloon, social media is about building business more than trying to maintain a presence.

Salon owner Taylor Burleson said hair styling is far less about finding a style in a magazine and more about seeing styles on social media. She said she does not even think those magazines are printed anymore, saying most times the stylists are working off a photo on someone's phone from social media.

"(Customers) don't have magazines anymore. They go to Pinterest, they go to Instagram... they specifically go to your Instagram to see how you do your work," Burleson said. "I think I have a love-hate relationship with (social media) because it's taxing to just always be doing it. But other times, it's the only way to grow your business."

Keeping a presence online takes a lot of time, she said, noting she has to find the right caption, the right picture.

However, having a brick and mortar business whose stock is not sold online, Burleson said, means having to get her name out to people. Early in her career, it meant having to "pound the pavement," going everywhere to introduce herself.

In terms of hair styling, she said, the process is reversed with influencing. Instead of wanting to cater to everyone, Burleson added, now it's more like, "This is my phone. This is what I offer. If you like what I offer, you come to me."

Developing the right vibe for the salon, Burleson said, is also important, adding Hair Unlimited works as a community instead of just independent contractors who do their own thing.

Keeping the salon's name out, she said, helps build trust, especially when dealing with parts of hair styling like doing highlights.

"If you call (a new salon) and ask to get highlights, they're putting chemicals on your head. You've never met them before. You don't know their skill level. You don't know what they specialize in. There's a very big open area to get something wrong," Burleson said. "It leaves a gray area which we like to limit as much as possible."

Creating content online, the salon owner added, is something for which she designates time, but she said she would rather have it happen organically for her business.

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Brewing with Bella

Badin Coffee showcases Italian espresso machine

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS MILLER

henever you first enter Badin Coffee, it can be a visually overwhelming experience, as everywhere you look there are vintage collectibles and antiques, including artwork, spa products, furniture and clothing, along with a giant stuffed black bear named Brewster.

But once you have gathered yourself, you will probably spot the welcoming presence of James Wahab at the far end of the space — past all the unique trinkets — standing in a compact mahogany bar, where he spends his time talking to customers and making them coffee.

As affable and knowledgeable as he is about the coffee-making process, the actual star of the show, and what keeps customers coming back, is Bella, the gleaming copper and brass espresso machine made in Italy.

"She's a workhorse," Wahab's wife Jodi said of the machine.

While Bella would appear out of place in most coffeehouses, Badin Coffee is unlike many of its peers. Inspired by the cafes the Wahabs visited in Italy, their business has a distinct European flair — fitting for a town with French roots dating back to its founding in the early 20th century.

"This machine represents, in my opinion, a mid-20th century espresso machine," Wahab said. "If you were in Italy in the 1950s, this is what you saw on every counter."

He is aware of only one other business in North Carolina — Fortuna Coffee in Greensboro — that features equipment similar to Bella.

"That's where we go to get Bella fixed," he said. "She has become famous and they know who she is."

In addition to Bella, Wahab also features a unique process of cold brew where chilled water is dripped over coffee grounds and then strained or filtered. This method, which can take up to 14 hours, takes place inside two Yama cold brew towers.

"This is low acidity and still has all the good flavors you would expect out of a good coffee, but it is shelf stable in the refrigerator for two or three weeks," he said.

Besides its coffee, the store offers soft serve ice cream and smoothies, homemade pastries, Boar's Head products, including black wax cheddar, Vermont white cheddar, ham, charcuterie packs and their famous seasoned crackers, one of their best-selling items.

"There are a lot of people that come in every week just to get our crackers," Jodi said.

Before opening Badin Coffee, James and Jodi were known for the Badin Treehouse Company restaurant, in what is now Loafers and Legends, which they operated for several years before closing. Keeping the name alive, the Wahabs have Treehouse Paints, also in a section of the building.

Even though many people are still learning about the business, it has already attracted many dedicated customers.

"The Badin Coffee Shop is a well-kept secret that should not be a secret any longer," said Roger Dick, president and CEO of Uwharrie Capital Corporation. "Aside from their great coffee, they also offer some of the best pastries. It's a great place in our community to meet up with



Two Yama cold brew towers.

friends."

Wahab understands that his business is colorful and unique and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"We are different, but in a good way," he said.

IT ALL STARTED WITH BELLA

The foundation for Badin Coffee, at 42 Falls Road, dates back to around 2011, when James and Jodi, who were living in the upstairs portion of the property, had the idea of purchasing an espresso coffee machine. They ended up buying an Elektra Belle Époque, which, according to its website, "is a machine of inimitable class, where beauty blends with functionality and reliability."

Once it arrived, they unwrapped it like two eager kids on Christmas morning. While they marveled at its beauty, they soon realized that neither actually knew how to work the machine properly.

To rectify the problem, the couple spent two weeks in Portland, Oregon at the American Barista and Coffee School, where they became trained baristas. They learned that espresso-making is an art, based less on technical details and more on instinct, including sight and sound.

"It has to look a certain way," Wahab said.

It was around this time that the Wahabs began contemplating how best to utilize the Falls Road property. The building had been in Jodi's family since her father, Jack Benoy, purchased it from artist Roger Thomas about a decade prior.

"Every once in a while we'd come downstairs and the thought was: 'What can we do to help Badin and utilize the downstairs?' " Wahab said.

Over the years, the couple had gradually accumulated many antique items, both from their family and from people in the community. Once they renovated the space for the coffeehouse, including bringing in the mahogany bar, which they purchased several years earlier, the Wahabs merged their fondness for antiques with their passion for coffee.

The Wahab's trip to Italy, which they took shortly after their training in Oregon, influenced much of the aesthetics, including the look of the bar

"There is a lot of European influence in the way, in my opinion, this has been designed because of our experiences when we traveled and Badin has a history and we wanted to be able to connect our customers with the history," Wahab said.

Besides her functionality, Bella's sleek look, with a small eagle affixed to her top, often attracts new customers.

"She is like a beautiful piece of art sitting on display," Jodi said.

WORKING TO PROMOTE BADIN

As a barista, Wahab hears many stories from people and over time, gets to form connections with his many customers, which he values and





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appreciates.

"When you're making a good cup of coffee and they feel comfortable and you're starting to get some stories out of them, it's a lot of fun," Wahab said. "I like being on this side because I can get all of that."

With word-of-mouth spreading and customers coming from beyond Stanly to check out the business, Wahab sees his business as an opportunity to promote the town. A couple from Norwood, interested in the Badin area, recently came to the shop to learn more about the town. Wahab

told them about the 1913 Badin Inn, the town museum and the town newsletter.

"It gives me an opportunity to sell Badin," he

said. Wahab also enjoys getting to know first-time

customers, many of whom are surprised to find such a unique business in a small town like Badin.

"We get a lot of people who come in and they



Brewster the bear hangs out in the shop.

go, 'I had no idea this was here,' " he said.

Since the shop opened in July 2021, it has turned into the de facto meeting place for residents.

"If you want to get the news and all the latest gossip, you come here," Badin resident Bridget Huckabee said.

Creating a comfortable space where people can

come together has always been a key aspect of coffeehouses.

"The coffee shops throughout history have been a place for people to meet and talk and gather," Wahab said. "That felt like something we could provide for Badin."

With its European influence, including Bella, Badin Coffee has attracted some international customers, especially those from Europe, who see it as a connection to their homelands.

In addition to Huckabee, who is from England, Wahab recalled a

Ukrainian woman who often frequents the shop with her husband. Unlike the many other coffee places she's visited in America, this one hits differently, as it reminds her of the coffee shops in her native country.

"She comes here because it reminds her of home," Wahab said.

Badin Coffee is open 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Thursday through Monday. **S**





A new life

Jana Strukova's journey from Communist Czechoslovakia to Stanly County

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS MILLER

hroughout her time growing up in Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia, a Central European country of about 5.5 million), Jana Strukova always possessed a strong desire to travel.

"My parents would say that I had an adventurous streak in me," she said. "I wasn't happy

settling down. I wanted to see the world."

After backpacking through most of Europe over summer break in college, Strukova took her wanderlust to the next level when she embarked for the United States in the late 1990s. She ended up in Stanly County in the mid-2000s and, following a personal tragedy, Strukova opened

the Mary and Martha Center for Women, an Albemarle-based advocacy and counseling center

A deeply religious person who has several theology degrees, Strukova feels Albemarle is where she is supposed to be — providing a refuge and safe space for women in Stanly County and the

surrounding area.

"I do believe in God's plan and I think there is a guiding hand and I strongly believe in the concept of vocational calling," she said. "I like to believe we orchestrate our own destinies and we are our own engineers of our own success and happiness."

GROWING UP IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

As a young child, Strukova always had a "very curious mind," and as a result, she often got "quickly bored" with what was happening in her life — both at school and at home.

"I always needed new impulses," she said, noting while she was a quiet child, she always had the urge to explore and see new things. An active reader and movie-watcher, she enjoyed being introduced to exotic locales and transported to faraway places.

"There was this inner drive in me that was propelling me to go out there and explore," she said. "Maybe it was a gift from God, I don't know. Maybe it was a personality trait. I just felt

it as long as I can remember."

Or maybe, Strukova notes, it was because, growing up in a repressed society under Communist control, travel represented a way she could take ownership of her life.

Raised in a Lutheran family, they regularly discussed topics such as theology and philosophy, Strukova said, though the actual practice of worship was often curtailed. It was not uncommon for government spies to report religious families to the authorities.

"Religion and faith, although there were churches, it was not really publicly encouraged by the government," she said. "It was more of an underground church."

The Communist government limited the opportunities afforded to people who were not members, including her family.

"Your life would be restricted," she said.

As a teenager, Strukova made trips to her church to take part in year-long confirmation classes. Her mother encouraged her to make sure the streets were empty before entering the church, so as not to attract any unwanted atten-

tion. She said the entire process was scary and unnerving for her.

She finally got to broaden her horizons and see the world during her time at a university in Slovakia, where she studied education and languages, primarily English. She spent her summers backpacking across Europe, spending large portions of her time living in London.

"It's so easy because within a couple of hours, you can cross a different country," she said, estimating she traveled to at least 90% of European countries during this time.

MEETING HER HUSBAND AND FINDING HER WAY TO STANLY COUNTY

Strukova worked as a teacher for several years in Slovakia before she made the trip to the United States in 1996. She wanted to study theology in depth, so she enrolled at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, where she was housed with other international students.

When asked by friends whether she was afraid





about making such a big trip, including her first overseas flight, Strukova told them she was "so excited."

"I was so looking forward to new experiences," she said, noting she was "thrilled" when she arrived at Newark Liberty International Airport.

Fascinated by the vibrancy of living in one of the biggest cities in the country, teeming with all kinds of ethnic groups, Strukova enjoyed getting to know the city, including visiting key spots such as the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall. She made trips with her professors and colleagues to New York City and also visited Pittsburgh, which had a heavy Slovakian influ-

She appreciated the relationships she formed with fellow international students from across the globe.

"I got to see students from all over," she said. Following four years in Philadelphia, Strukova, encouraged by her professors, enrolled in Princeton Theological Seminary to pursue a P.h.D. in theology. While she received an education — she found something far more important. It was here that she met another student, her future husband Doug Hume.

With both having to take foreign language classes, Hume was first introduced to Strukova after she asked to borrow his French dictionary.

"One of the things that I really appreciated about her was that she was really smart," he said.

Having lived in Germany for several years, Hume also appreciated Strukova had an international perspective.

The couple found their way south, first to Bristol, Virginia, and then to Albemarle in 2007, as Hume accepted a job as a professor of the New Testament at Pfeiffer University.

"I had never heard of Stanly County," Strukova said, noting that moving to a small rural community was a major "culture shock" compared with living in the densely populated Northeast.

As opposed to other Northern transplants

living in Stanly, Strukova distinctly stood out because of her accent.

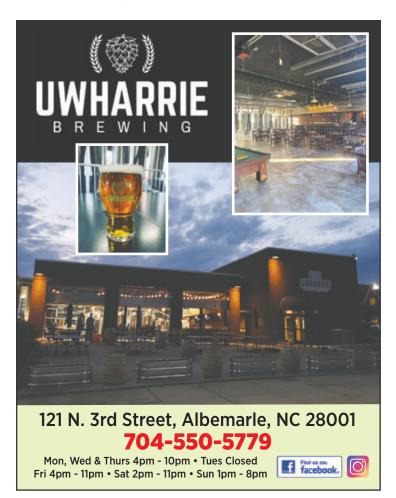
"I guess people are perplexed because they have never seen anyone from Slovakia," she said about the questions she often fielded about where she was from. Many people initially thought she was Russian.

With Hume busy at Pfeiffer, Strukova served as a theology professor with Wesley Theological Seminary, a United Methodist Church seminary in Washington, D.C., where she traveled each month to various cities.

"We had a house here, but I still kind of had one foot out," she said.

Over time, Strukova said she grew to appreciate "the slowness and quietness" of living in Albemarle. She also enjoyed the moderate weather and easy navigation, especially compared with the complex turnpikes she experienced in New Jersey during her years at Princeton.

"I'm not saying that for everybody that life is easy here, but there is a certain ease in small



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towns," she said.

CHANNELING GRIEF INTO ACTION

Strukova remembers spending time with her brother Dusan Struk, who had visited her shortly after she and Hume moved to Stanly County. Two days after she saw her brother off at Charlotte Douglas International Airport, he died in a car accident.

Following his death, she took time to grieve and "walk through my dark valley."

As she was processing her brother's passing, Strukova returned to school, where she studied counseling at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte. As part of an internship, Strukova spent a year as a mental health counselor at the Stanly County Senior Center.

In coping with her own grief, she believes the seeds were first planted for the Mary and Martha Center, which opened in 2016. The name is a tribute to her grandmother Mary and her older sister Martha, both of whom Strukova was close with as a young child. Despite overcoming many obstacles, including losing their husbands in World War II, her relatives survived "only by the grace of God," Strukova was told.

"They were my first spiritual teachers," Strukova said.

Since opening the center, Strukova and her small team have provided mental health services such as counseling and depression screenings to individuals, especially those uninsured or below the poverty income line.

Regina Butler, who started working at the center in 2017, recalled Strukova being "just full of good ideas on how to better serve the women here in Stanly County."

In getting to know Strukova over the years, "we just clicked because we have the same heart," said Butler, a mentor with the Side-by-Side mentoring program. "We want to help people and we're all about serving people."

As part of a video series called "Can We Tell Your Story?" Strukova interviewed close to 30 people during the COVID-19 pandemic to see how they were faring, including Peter Asciutto, Charlotte Maness, Joy Almond and Heather Kilde.

"That was a very successful encouragement





The Mary and Martha Center for Women and Community Care is at 138 W. South St., Albemarle.

series," she said.

Hume has enjoyed seeing his wife have such a positive impact on so many people throughout the area.

"I'm quite proud of her, for being entrepreneurial, creative and finding a way to make some things happen," he said.

By helping others work through their problems, Strukova learned to improve her own life.

"I felt that when I was helping others to process their pain and to help people walk through

their dark valleys, that I was actually helping myself, in the sense of facilitating healing for myself, too," she said. "It was kind of a mutual process that helping others helped me heal my own wounds."

She compares the healing process to a vase that is shattered into many pieces. Over time, the fragments get put back together, but the scars are still visible. It is only by embracing the scars, and seeing them as strengths rather than weaknesses, that people can fully heal. This takes time, and a dedicated support group, she said.

"Healing takes place in the community with others, for others, by others and it is a mutual process," she said. "We heal as members of the one body."

Understanding that everyone has as a unique story to tell, Strukova strives for the Mary and Martha Center to be a place where people "are more intimately known as human beings."

And as for her story, of a woman always looking for her next big adventure?

"I am more and more at peace that there is a certain purpose in my life that I am called to fulfill and I have just tried to obey and trust God."



Catty Wampus Q&A

An interview with new Uwharrie team mascot

BY CHARLES CURCIO

he new Uwharrie Wampus Cats baseball team calling Don Montgomery Park in Albemarle home recently hosted a naming contest for the team's new mascot.

Out of a number of suggestions, the name Catty Wampus was chosen.

Charles Curcio, sports editor of the Stanly News and Press, recently had the chance to ask some questions of the new mascot. Here are those questions and answers:

What brings you to Stanly County and how did you find out about this area?

Well, I've lived in Stanly County for years off and on. This summer will be the longest I've spent in a well-lighted part of Albemarle proper in one summer. For the most part I've managed to avoid detection. Usually when somebody says they've seen a wampus cat, nobody believes them. Or that's what I've heard.

I should say I've spent a little time in Montgomery County too and in the national forest. Badin Lake is great. So is Tillery Lake. No, I do not own a boat. I also have cousins up in Rockwell living at Tiger World.

What can fans expect from you at the games this season, along with the new baseball team?

I think we're all going to be in for a bit of a surprise. To be honest, I haven't performed in front of crowds before, but I'm looking forward to the challenge. My goal is to not scare anyone aside from the Disco Turkeys and some players on other teams we play. I'm really looking forward to scaring the pants off the Queen City Corndogs when they come in.

3) Will you be making any appearances around Albemarle and Stanly County? Will people be able to book you for various events?

My handlers have indicated I might be at some Food Truck Fridays events with the parks and recreation team. Looking forward to that. There's a great chance you'll see me at street festivals this summer or hanging out at some of our sponsor businesses in the area. Sure, interested parties can check with the team for my availability. I used to be known as a recluse, but I was told if I wanted the job I had to break that habit.





What is your favorite food at the ballpark? Nachos.

Have you met any other local mascots, like Homer, Chubby Checker or (dare I say his name) Boogie from the Disco Turkeys?

I have met Boogie the Disco Turkey and I hate him. In general, I'm open-minded about meeting other mascots. It would be nice to have Chubby Checker pay us a visit sometime this summer. If other minor league teams want to send over their mascots, email our team. I think they'd be interested.

Where are you staying in between games?

I've been advised not to talk about that too much. Do not look for me along the creek behind the ballpark between games. I will not be fishing out there. If I were planning to fish out there, I wouldn't tell you the spots where I catch the big ones.

What are your general likes and dislikes?

I like eating. I'm more into ballpark food these days, like you've alluded. I enjoy food trucks. I guess my tastes have refined.

I hate umpires. That's the big one. I've been told I wasn't supposed to say that out loud, but this is my interview.

When were you born and how old are you?

I've been around for a few decades, believe it or not. I've been told I age like the Baby Yoda character on that show.

How do you feel about your new stomping grounds?

Well, I like baseball. I've heard we've got a good team. Unlike the Oakland A's, we're here to stay in our city. The Wampus Cats will not be moving to Oakland when the A's move to Vegas in 2027.

The team is working on some new seating areas. It's going to be very comfortable. The City of Albemarle has been doing a lot to make Don Montgomery Park a fun spot this summer. Of course there's the natural beauty of the creek behind the facility, which appeals to any wampus cat, so of course I like that.

I also like generally how you can be in the city here and make a weekend out of it and go out to the lakes and Uwharrie Mountains, but I'm sure that's what everyone says. S



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