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About this section

- B.J. Drye, editor and general manager
- Susan Wolf and Shelby Sides, advertising sales
- Debbie Holt, distribution
- Andy Mooney, layout and design
- Toby Thorpe and Jo Grey, contributing writers

On the cover: Alydia Wheeler performs with the City Youth Ballet; Russ Sharples appears in "A Few Good Men"; Vicki Galloway works on a glass project.

Special thanks

The Stanly News & Press thanks Stanly County Arts Council director Renee VanHorn and all the artists for contributing to this project. The Arts Council logo was designed by John Huneycutt.



Aliyah Thorne and her brother Ethan decorate masks during the Celebration of the Arts! March 25, 2023 at the Stanly County Agri-Civic Center.

Major milestone

Stanly County Arts Council marks 50 years

BY TOBY THORPE

For the Stanly News & Press

Celebrating its 50th birthday in 2024, the Stanly County Arts Council provides wide-ranging support for arts-related activities of all types in the community.

“For Stanly County’s size, we are blessed with as many arts opportunities as some large metropolitan areas,” says Renee VanHorn, who has served as Arts Council director since 2016. “Our organization is volunteer-driven by a passionate community of artists, with

a mission to encourage and promote broad-based cultural and educational activities in the arts throughout Stanly County.”

Founded in 1974 by Harold H. Hilburn within the Stanly County Chamber of Commerce, the council now operates independently. Funding comes from private and public sources, including the North Carolina Arts Council (with funding support from the National Endowment for the Arts), in addition to private donations and sponsorships from local businesses. The Stanly County Agri-Civic Center houses the Council’s office, as

well as provides exhibit space.

“Much of what we do is ‘behind the scenes,’ ” said VanHorn, who noted a number of affiliated organizations that SCAC supports. “We assist in funding, promoting and publicizing all genres of the arts throughout the county, and partner with a number of arts-focused organizations.”

Of the organizations to which VanHorn alludes, several predate the Arts Council itself.

“The Stanly County Concert Association is the oldest such group, having been established in 1947,” she noted. “The

Stanly Arts Guild had its beginnings in 1963, and the Stanly County Chorale was founded in 1968.”

Local arts groups that have come upon the scene since SCAC was formed include the Uwharrie Players (1975), Uwharrie Youth Arts/City Youth Ballet (1998), The Talent Company (2005) and the Stanly County Concert Band (2012).

In addition to supporting these organizations, the Arts Council has been instrumental in establishing a number of community programs and events that promote arts to citizens of all ages.

“Our Celebration of the ARTS grew

out of a gala event called 'Evening of the ARTS,' " VanHorn said. "In 2016 a consensus was made to change to a free event open to the public, adding varied aspects to inform area residents of all that Stanly County has to offer in the arts."

Events comprising Celebration of the ARTS include live performances highlighting local dancers, choral groups, musicians, theater groups and bands; information booths and demonstrations by local arts organizations and businesses; opportunities for artists to display and sell their pieces; and "Creation Station," which provides children of all ages a way to create their own art to take home.

"A key element of the Celebration is a county-wide student art show," VanHorn said. "It includes all private and public elementary, middle and high schools, plus entries from Stanly Community College and Pfeiffer University. Schools are limited on the number of entries, so it is an honor to be selected."

Recognition of local artists at the Celebration is the highlight of the event, according to VanHorn.

"We announce recipients of regional Artist Support Grants, as well as honor the winners of the Fine Arts Educator of the Year and the Arts Person of the Year," she said.

The Arts Council also has established and expanded cultural education programs through school partnerships.

"This started in the early days of the Stanly County Arts Council, and exposes students to different arts genres," VanHorn noted, adding that all students in pre-K through 10th grade are provided experiences with professional artists.

"Elementary students have experienced performers such as puppetry with Doug Berkey and Opera Express. Middle School students have learned about the origins of hip-hop and rap music through the Soul Street Dancers and have attended performances by the North Carolina Youth Tap Ensemble. Plus, high schoolers have learned about Stanly County's own Lou Donaldson through artists like John Brown, and about the history of blues to rock from Scott Ainsley," VanHorn said.

Students also benefit from free admission each year when SCAC brings the Charlotte Symphony in concert to the Agri-Civic Center.

"Because of strong community support, students are able to attend the concert free and we are able to keep ticket prices low for everyone else," said VanHorn.

A summer arts camp, started in 2008, has recently expanded and is able to pro-

vide scholarships to at-risk youth thanks to local sponsor support.

"It's my favorite program," VanHorn said, "because one can witness firsthand the joy that the arts bring to our youth. Throughout the week of camp, the students make new friends and learn how to express themselves. Hopefully, this will ignite the spark for a lifelong love of the arts."

In celebration of the Arts Council's golden anniversary, an exhibit at the Stanly County History Center is scheduled to run from April to July.

"The exhibit will feature all the arts organizations in Stanly County, and will include a number of artifacts, and histo-

ries and biographies of key artists from the county," VanHorn said.

She was also quick to credit the many people and organizations who give of time and resources to promote and expand arts opportunities in Stanly County.

"The credit must be given to the numerous volunteers who ensure that the arts continue to thrive," she said. "We all benefit from the abundance of time, talent and dedication that these groups and individuals are committed to each year."

Toby Thorpe is a freelance writer for The Stanly News & Press.



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Susan Lackey with some of her artworks in her "Nature's Resonance" series.

Providing funding

Grants available to artists, organizations

BY TOBY THORPE

For the Stanly News & Press

In addition to promoting the arts through various programs and events, the Stanly County Arts Council serves as a key information point for local artists and arts organizations seeking grant funding.

"In addition to the support we receive from donors, businesses and sponsors, a portion of the annual funding we receive from the North Carolina Arts Council through their Grassroots Grant program supports our key operations," said Renee VanHorn, Stanly Arts Council director. "Twenty percent of this grant

goes to support our key operations, and the remaining 80 percent goes directly back into the community in the form of subgrants which support arts programs in the county."

The Stanly Arts Guild is one of the local arts organizations benefiting from these subgrants.

"We wouldn't be able to operate our facility if not for the Grassroots Subgrant," said Wendy Hillhouse, president of the Guild, who noted that the grant funds help offset recurring facility expenses such as rent and utilities.

As a result, the organization is able to offer its four major annual programs, in addition to regular member meetings,

classes, and exhibitions at its 330 N. Second St. location.

In addition to Stanly Arts Guild, other 2023 subgrant recipients include:

- Stanly County Chorale (support for community concerts);
- Stanly County Concert Association (funding for a season of professional musical artists);
- Stanly County Concert Band (fall and spring concerts);
- Stanly County Partnership for Children (free theatre experience for preschool children and families);
- Stanly County Schools (performing artists for the Cultural Education Program);

- Stanly County Senior Center (Senior Spirit Day);

- Uwharrie Players (operational funds for the season); and

- Uwharrie Youth Arts (support for performance of "The Nutcracker").

Individual artists may also apply for Artist Support Grants, which support a broad range of artists in multiple genres.

"The Artist Support Grant funds professional and artistic development for emerging and established artists to enhance their skills and abilities to create work, or to improve their capacity to bring their work to new audiences," VanHorn said.

See Funding, page 11



Fred T. Morgan, center, receives an award for best features in the 1953 North Carolina Press Association contest.

Not scared of oddities

SNAP reporter covered his share of unusual stories

BY JO GREY

For the Stanly News & Press

Most writers guard their solitude. Fred T. Morgan never stood a chance. Morgan began his esteemed 34-year career at the Stanly News & Press in 1951, spending a chunk of his writing days in a newsroom with four other newsmen, four desk phones and four clacking typewriters — not exactly the sound of silence.

When his byline first appeared, his readers were asking, “Who’s Fred Morgan?” His colleague at the time, George Weaver, tried to tell them.

Weaver’s column reported Morgan was born in Big Lick in 1926 and graduated from Aquadale High School in 1943. He then enlisted in the United States Navy and spent his World War II service repairing airplane propellers in Florida. Morgan came back home to Stanly County and a job with the North Carolina Highway Department in 1946.

He married Isabelle Griffin in 1951, the same year he was hired at the SNAP.

Weaver described Morgan as “a retiring young man, with reddish hair...[who] goes about his work conscientiously...has a soft voice...a gifted writer...” Weaver said Morgan’s journalism training came by way of correspondence courses from the Newspaper Institute of America.

No matter his slim writing credentials, Morgan proved himself in his first year at the SNAP. His first-place award from the North Carolina Press

Association for his semi-weekly feature articles was a first for the Stanly newspaper. Other awards followed. Readers began dropping by the SNAP offices on West North Street to meet him and share news tips. As Stanly County folks got to know Morgan, he got to know them.

On the acknowledgment page of his 2008 book, “Come to the Lobby,” Morgan said, “I’ll betcha no staffer on a small-town newspaper anywhere had as colorful and productive a cadre of tipsters and informers as I had going for me.”

He even gained the reputation of Oddity Editor.

Morgan also admitted some resentment over the frequent interruptions. A 12-second walk from the newsroom to the lobby to hear about things like gigantic watermelons or three-legged chickens triggered impatience and frowns from the young newsman — until he decided to change his attitude — until, “A call to the lobby became the most enjoyable time of my workday.”

His 1974 book, “Uwharrie Magic,” had its beginnings in the 1940s when Morgan began roaming the seven-county Uwharrie Mountain region. According to his introduction to a later book, “Uwharrie Bizarres, Colorful Characters from America’s Oldest Mountains,” he was looking for any scary stories folks could tell.

Freddie Morgan, his son, was 4 years old when his mom and dad moved from Albemarle to a plot of country property off Valley Drive.

“Over the years we spent hundreds of hours beside a campfire chatting. Dad’s interest in folklore is what drew his attention. Ghost stories came as a sideline,” said Freddie Morgan. He remembers people asking if the stories were true. “Dad didn’t make them up,

Books by Fred T. Morgan

- “Ghost Tales of the Uwharries,” 1968
- “Uwharrie Magic,” 1974
- “Haunted Uwharries,” 1992
- “The Revolt, and 28 More Original Uwharrie Ghost Stories,” 2004
- “Uwharrie Bizarres, Colorful Characters from America’s Oldest Mountains,” 2007
- “Come to the Lobby,” 2008

but he related the stories as they were told to him.”

Morgan’s strong work ethic learned from his parents, C.C. and Elizabeth Springer Morgan, and an instinctive grasp of human nature, informed his research methods. He kept work boots, coveralls, a straw hat, work gloves and a few tools in his pickup. When he found a house, or a family working in a field, he introduced himself and his desire to hear their stories, but first, he said, “let’s work awhile.”

Whatever they were doing, he pitched in — putting up fences, killing hogs, pickling beans — giving them time to think and to size him up.

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Bridget Huckabee, fellow-writer and Badin friend, remembers Morgan as a storyteller who was single-minded in his love of Stanly County history and who treated his well-researched subjects with a humorous, “light touch.”

Annette Starnes, Morgan’s daughter, remembers her dad walking back in the Albemarle house after a day of backwoods wanderings during the 1960s, yellow legal pad in hand, and say, “Let me go peck on my typewriter.”

Starnes says sometimes the whole family would go on visits — Isabelle, and daughters Rosemary and Annette, and later their younger brother Freddie. After Morgan’s first meeting with a man regarded as the last genuine hermit in the area, he took his wife and daughters to meet the old gentleman.

“After parking the El Camino, we walked quite a way through the woods. My sister and I were only 7 and 8 years old and we were a little scared,” said Starnes.

Morgan was an occasional Sunday school teacher at Badin Baptist Church, recalls longtime member Pawnee Barden.

“His ghost stories sometimes showed

up in the lessons,” she said.

Morgan also showed up at Badin Elementary School around the end of October each year that Freddie was a student, sharing those ghost stories with his son’s classes — a source of pride for young Freddie.

Morgan took up other 9-to-5 jobs after his tenure at the SNAP, and Starnes says her dad continued to use his talents well into retirement.

“He was a super photographer, a wonderful woodworker and gardener,” said Starnes.

He added piano lessons to his resumé when he was 65, she said.

When Morgan died in 2009, at the age of 82, B. J. Drye’s editorial response in the SNAP recognized Morgan as one of the last links to a long-gone era who “created a wealth of fact and fiction for generations to enjoy.”

Accessing that wealth of stories may take a little searching these days, but it’s well worth the effort and would be a small tribute to Fred T. Morgan, who for 60 years searched tirelessly for stories, and maybe ghosts, and discovered his Stanly County neighbors in the process — colorful characters all, and he considered himself one of them.

Jo Grey is a freelance writer.

FUNDING, from page 8

She noted that the grant is managed through a partnership with the Arts Council of Moore County to serve artists in Anson, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Stanly, and Union counties.

Albemarle-based acrylic and mixed media artist Susan Lackey is a two-time recipient of this grant.

“The most recent grant enabled me to purchase a double-mast easel,” said Lackey, who outlined the need for the larger mount in her grant application.

“I had always been around corporate art in my past career with Duke Energy,” added Lackey, “and in order to be able to produce pieces that could be used in corporate areas such as boardrooms, lobbies and hallways, I found that I needed to produce larger paintings.”

She explained that the single-mast easel at her studio was neither sturdy enough nor wide enough to accommodate such larger pieces.

“I’d have to paint with one hand and use the other to hold the canvas steady,” she said. “I also needed an easel that could give me the capability to raise and lower the piece.”

The grant, for \$1,500, was funded, and Lackey was quick to express gratitude to VanHorn for her assistance through the grant-writing process.

“The grant process is not complicated, but if you’re not familiar with the procedure, it can be tricky,” she said. “(Renee) was very helpful along the way with her encouragement, advice and recommendations.”

In addition to Lackey, local musician Richard Cutright Jr. was also a recipient of an Artist Support Grant, used to purchase computer software for recording music.

For information on available grants, application process and requirements and grant application workshops, interested artists or organizations may contact the Stanly County Arts Council at 704-982-8118 or stanlycountyartscouncil1974@gmail.com.

Toby Thorpe is a freelance writer for The Stanly News & Press.



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William James Lassiter

Lassiter talks touring, new project

BY B.J. DRYE

bj.drye@stanlynewspress.com

William James Lassiter has always had a creative side, whether it be dance, theatre or music.

But his talents were put on a grander stage last year. He wrapped up an eight-month tour performing in “The Book of Mormon.”

“The show follows two Mormon missionaries on their mission to a country and culture they are unfamiliar with,” Lassiter said.

The play was written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the creators of “South Park.”

He was with the official touring company of the Broadway production from August 2022 to April 2023.

The first three weeks were rehearsals, followed by two weeks of tech, Lassiter said, which involved setting the show lighting, sound, costumes and set.

“We were the first production of ‘The Book of Mormon’ back on the road since Covid shut everything down,” Lassiter said.

“Living on the road is multifaceted,

especially in its pros and cons,” he added. “A lot of people thrive in an ever changing environment, which is absolutely my experience. I loved constantly moving from city to city, always a new bar, a new restaurant, etc. However, that desire for change also branches into my artistic outlets.”

Though he enjoyed life on the road, Lassiter also found it hindered his other goals.

“I love producing music, and have also been auditioning a lot more for film and television recently. And being on the road doing eight shows a week, and

living out of a hotel room (with a roommate) doesn’t lend itself to much artistic growth and experiment in other forms,” he said. “Essentially, I didn’t feel like I had the space to create, and move forward in my other goals on tour.”

While he did not perform when the tour stopped in Charlotte, he was able to appear at the Durham Performing Arts Center in Durham and the Tanger Center in Greensboro.

Lassiter said he has learned much from his touring experience.

“I learned a whole lot about character acting, and the level of not only confi-

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dence, but projection and commitment it requires,” he said.

“I was cast as ensemble, but I was also a lead understudy for Elder Cunningham, who is very much a comedic side kick, and a big character role,” he added. “My experience with acting in the past has never been with character roles, it just wasn’t normally the bill I fit. So as I moved through auditions initially being looked at for strictly Elder Cunningham, it really made me think maybe I had this style of acting in me. Then once I was cast as an understudy, I was incredibly nervous. After a few months I finally debuted as Cunningham at the Pantages theatre in Los Angeles. I was horrified, but when I came out for bows, having made it through with only a few hiccups, I felt validated in this new space.”

Lassiter points to his origins of acting locally and credits that exposure to fostering his love of acting.

“I started dancing at the age of 3 at Albemarle Academy of Dance where we didn’t just have dance classes, but also acting and voice,” he said. “So every now and again we would have an opportunity to audition for a show being put on locally. I believe my first full fledged the-

atre show was ‘101 Dalmatians’ where I played Horace. I believe I was 9 or 10. From there, around age 13, I began doing more and more community theatre with Talent Company and Uwharrie Players which solidified my love and respect for musical theatre.”

Although he left the tour, he wants to continue acting.

“Honing that particular craft is something I find very fulfilling, and I very much enjoy the feeling I get doing it, even when it’s a last minute audition on tape,” Lassiter said. “The idea of playing pretend for a living is a crazy concept, and something I was very much drawn to.

“Acting and performing will always be a part of my life as long as I can help it.”

As for his next project, Lassiter is producing a 10-song album, something he has been working on since 2019.

“It’s quite expensive and time consuming, but very fulfilling when a project comes out how you imagined it, and sometimes in ways you didn’t imagine,” he said.

B.J. Drye is editor and general manager of The Stanly News & Press.



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Marjel Jones admires the watercolors during Stanly Arts Guild's open house. (Photo by Charles Curcio/Stanly News & Press)

Stanly Arts Guild still going strong at 60

Contributed

For the first 44 years of its existence, the Stanly Arts Guild was without a public venue for selling art. In 2007 a group of downtown merchants in Albemarle offered the Guild access to the Belk Building on West Main Street as a home for the Guild and a venue for selling art. A contest to name the venue was held, and Falling Rivers Gallery was selected as the name.

Grey Carle, of New London, was voted in

as the original director of the Gallery, serving from 2007-2009. At that time, Nancy Lipe, from Millingport, became the director and served until June 2018, when the building was sold and Falling Rivers Gallery was dissolved.

After several months of searching the Guild found a new home at 330C N. Second St. in Albemarle. It opened in February 2019, selling art in what was originally built as an A&P grocery store in the early 1950s.

The "Summer Art Explosion" has been an annual tradition of the Stanly Arts Guild for



Lili Holland works on an art display during Stanly Arts Guild's open house. (Photo by Charles Curcio/Stanly News & Press)



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several decades. Well-known judges are selected to judge the local and regional fine arts exhibit, making this a highlight of summer at the Guild.

Regular monthly meetings have been an integral part of the Stanly Arts Guild since its organization. According to past minutes, the Stanly Room, located in the Home Savings and Loan building, was the dominant place to meet, with a few other locations being Christ Episcopal Church, First Lutheran Church, Stanly County Public Library and Stanly Community College.

Inflation has affected the cost of Guild membership, as early dues were \$6. By

the mid 1990s, the dues had doubled to \$12, and have now risen to the current cost of \$40 per year.

Some of the first presidents of the Guild were Bob Amos, Dick Jarrett, Mary K. Spear, Grace Tunner, Myrtle Ridenhour, Judy Murrell and Creola Williams. Later presidents include Pat Hartley, Anita Ammerman, Faith Alexander, Margaret Sauls, Jaclyn Layman, Nancy Lipe, Millie Campbell, and now, Wendy Hillhouse.

The Stanly Arts Guild has come a long way in the sixty years of its existence and leadership of artists and art lovers has been a huge factor in its success.



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Madeline Medline, Charlotte Maness, Laura Wheeler, Edna Lipe-Harkey and Sarah Tysinger portrayed Annelle, Clairee, M'lynn, Truvy and Shelby, respectively, in "Steel Magnolias" in 2010. (Photo by James Cotton)

Life is a stage for Uwharrie Players

Contributed

The Uwharrie Players was formed in the spring of 1975 as an outgrowth of the Stanly County Arts Council.

Thirty-four charter members set out to establish a vehicle that would provide local citizens an opportunity to perform on stage while also exposing Stanly

County to quality theatrical entertainment.

In the early years, The Uwharrie Players performed in local schools, churches and other spaces prior to the local Agri-Civic Center being built in 1989.

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, The Uwharrie Players, Inc. depends on

support from individuals, businesses and grants to fund its operating expenses. Membership in the organization is open to anyone wishing to join.

The organization is unique in that every season of productions is chosen by a vote of the membership. A volunteer Board of Directors serves as the governing body of the organization. The

Uwharrie Players has no full- or part-time paid staff. Production staff is hired specific to each show.

The first show ever produced by the UP was "Oklahoma!" (1975) It was produced again in 1994 and 2014. "Grease" (1998) was the best attended show.

Some memorable moments within the organization:

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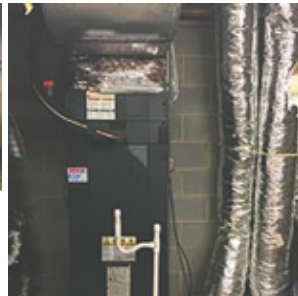
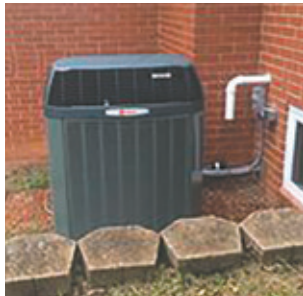
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• One of our long-time, dearest members has appeared on stage exactly once. She was talked into carrying a sign across stage in “Annie Get Your Gun” (1982). She was terrified and vowed never to be on stage again, and hasn’t been.

• In 1980, the cast of “Godspell” was featured on “Good Morning Carolina,” a regional morning television show.

• During a production of “Anything Goes” (1991), the power went out. The Board entertained the idea, albeit only briefly, of continuing the show using flashlights. The decision was ultimately made to cancel the show and allow those patrons to return on a different night.

• During a production of “The Wizard of Oz” (2002), the theatre had been invaded by flying squirrels. The timing could not have been more perfect as they flew over the stage and actors during “... Lions, and tigers and bears, oh my!”

• We’ve had many second-generation Players grace our stage. But this year, we had two third-generation Uwharrie Players, both acting in supporting roles together in “Bright Star” (2023).

• Life imitated art when our Captain VonTrapp and Maria got together during “The Sound of Music” (2009) and later married. They currently have two children and remain involved in the arts in



Emily Morris and Michael Furr appear as Annie and Daddy Warbucks in the musical “Annie” in 2010. (Photo by James Cotton)

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their community. Our theatre company has been the backdrop for a few marriages over the years.

• In every production of “Godspell,” the same actor portrayed Jesus (1979, 1980, 1985, 2016). One time, this actor showed up at a board member’s house for a meeting and the board member’s child said, “Jesus is at the door.”

• In 2013, The Uwharrie Players premiered a play written by one of our own, Mark Cook’s “The Codgerella.”

• For the past two years, The Uwharrie Players has received grant awards from the Foundation for the Carolinas to present Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA).

TYA is a project by which we partner with the Cultural Education Program arm of the Stanly County Arts Council and the Stanly County Schools system to provide an additional production in our season geared specifically toward young children.

Adults still do the acting, but the shows are based on books read by the elementary school students. The mission is to both provide quality theatre experiences, free of charge, to the children of Stanly County, as well as to support the local curriculum while integrating

theatre etiquette with the curriculum.

Our further purpose is to increase interest in theatre at a young age so that these children will grow to be involved, in a meaningful way, in continuing the tradition of The Uwharrie Players for the next 50 years.

• In 2004, we began offering a live Christmas radio show performance to our patrons whereby they could enjoy a meal and then watch a live radio show. The radio show was recorded and then aired on local radio stations during the Christmas holiday.

Shows were always done in the format of a 1920s radio show broadcast, with actors dressing in period clothing and all sound effects created live, on stage, for the audience to watch.

Commercials for local business sponsors were written and performed as well. Favorite radio shows included “It’s a Wonderful Life,” “Miracle on 34th Street,” “A Christmas Carol” and Bob Inman’s “The Christmas Bus.” Bob even attended a performance and provided a book-signing opportunity. “War of the Worlds” was also presented one fall season.

These radio shows were an annual tradition through 2016.

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The Uwharrie Players have been performing "theatre magic" since 1975.

Here is a list of the productions:

- 1975: "Oklahoma," "Li'l Abner"
- 1976: "You Can't Take it With You," "The Sound of Music"
- 1977: "Barefoot in the Park," "Fiddler on the Roof," "The Glass Menagerie"
- 1978: "South Pacific"
- 1979: "Godspell," "Gypsy," "Plaza Suite"
- 1980: "Godspell," "Carousel," "The Fantasticks"
- 1981: "The Dark at the Top of the Stairs," "Guys and Dolls," "Wait Until Dark"
- 1982: "Don't Drink the Water," "Annie Get Your Gun"
- 1983: "Bus Stop," "Once Upon a Mattress," "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown"
- 1984: "I Remember Mama," "Hello Dolly," "Dracula the Musical"
- 1985: "The Mousetrap," "Godspell"
- 1986: "The Odd Couple," "Bye Bye Birdie"
- 1987: "Snoopy," "Annie," "Cactus Flower"
- 1988: "The Foreigner," "Oliver," "Little Shop of Horrors"
- 1989: "The Nerd," "Best Little

Whorehouse in Texas," "Cotton Patch Gospel"

- 1990: "Our Town," "The Sound of Music," "Dames at Sea"
- 1991: "Arsenic and Old Lace," "Anything Goes," "Pump Boys and Dinettes"
- 1992: "Lend Me a Tenor," "The Music Man," "The Miracle Worker"
- 1993: "The Boys Next Door," "Into the Woods," "Baby"
- 1994: "The Foreigner," "Oklahoma," "Dracula the Musical"
- 1995: "Driving Miss Daisy," "My Fair Lady," "Nunsense"
- 1996: "The Widow's Best Friend," "Damn Yankees," "Best Christmas Pageant Ever"
- 1997: "Steel Magnolias," "Guys and Dolls," "Deathtrap"
- 1998: "Harvey," "Grease," "Smoke on the Mountain"
- 1999: "Grandest Canyon," "Li'l Abner," "Crimes of the Heart"
- 2000: "Catfish Moon," "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," "A Sanders Family Christmas"
- 2001: "Godspell," "James and the Giant Peach," "Greater Tuna"
- 2002: "Love Letters," "The Wizard of Oz," "Cotton Patch Gospel"
- 2003: "The Rainmaker," "Annie Get Your Gun," "The Diary of Anne Frank"

• 2004: "On Golden Pond," "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," "Ramona Quimby," "It's a Wonderful Life" (Radio)

- 2005: "Nunsense II," "South Pacific," "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Miracle on 34th Street" (Radio)
- 2006: "Crossroads," "The King and I," "Blessed Assurance," "A Christmas Carol" (Radio)
- 2007: "The Boys Next Door," "Disney's Beauty and the Beast," "A Grand Night for Singing," "It's a Wonderful Life" (Radio)
- 2008: "To Kill a Mockingbird," "Children of Eden," "Smoke on the Mountain Homecoming," "The Christmas Bus" (Radio)
- 2009: "Of Mice and Men," "The Sound of Music," "Sweeney Todd," "A Christmas Story" (Radio)
- 2010: "Steel Magnolias," "Annie," "Smoke on the Mountain," "Miracle on 34th Street" (Radio)
- 2011: "Don't Cry for Me Margaret Mitchell," "Dearly Departed," "All Shook Up," "War of the Worlds" (Radio), "A High Country Christmas"
- 2012: "The Fantasticks," "Camelot," "12 Angry Men," "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" (Radio)
- 2013: "The Dixie Swim Club," "Big

River," "The Codgerella," "A Christmas Carol" (Radio)

- 2014: "Driving Miss Daisy," "Oklahoma," "Pump Boys and Dinettes," "It's a Wonderful Life" (Radio)
- 2015: "Almost Maine," "Young Frankenstein," "Company," "Nativity Play" (Radio)
- 2016: "Curious Savage," "Godspell," "Leap of Faith," "Shout," "Yes Virginia There is a Santa Claus" (Radio)
- 2017: "Elvis Has Left the Building," "Mary Poppins," "A Few Good Men"
- 2018: "Drinking Habits," "Cinderella," "On Golden Pond"
- 2019: "The Doyle and Debbie Show," "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," "Let Him Sleep Til It's Time for His Funeral"
- 2020: "The Hallelujah Girls," "The Virtual Family," "Murder Unlimited" (Radio)
- 2021: "I'm Dying to Be in the Choir," "Blithe Spirit"
- 2022: "The Odd Couple," "Little House on the Prairie the Musical," "The Diary of Anne Frank"
- 2023: "The Hundred Dresses" (TYA), "Down to Earth," "Bright Star," "Honky Tonk Angels"
- 2024: "Miss Nelson is Missing" (TYA), "Southern Fried Nuptials," "The Addams Family," "Four Old Broads"



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Carl Giammarese, lead guitarist for the 1960s rock group The Buckinghams, shows off a 45 rpm record during the band's performance at the Stanly County Agri-Civic Center for the Stanly County Concert Association. (Photo by B.J. DRYE)

Stanly County Concert Association still grooving after 75 years

Contributed

Three citizens with an idea ... and now we celebrate our 75th year of concerts.

The only break was with the pandemic which stopped everything and this is actually is the 76th anniversary of this amazing arts contribution to our community.

In 1947, Paul Fry, the high school choral director, Katherine Almond, the elementary music teacher, and Ralph Groves, a businessman who just happened to play the violin, met in the band room at Albemarle Senior High School to discuss bringing professional concerts

to Stanly County. This was the beginning of the Stanly County Concert Association. We are indebted to these people, through contacting Columbia Artists in New York, brought James Wolfe to Albemarle on Jan. 16, 1948. He met with Chamber of Commerce members, Bill Page and Mrs. David Morrow to discuss this possibility.

Immediately, Mrs. Morrow filled membership kits, made phone calls and planned a banquet at the Albemarle Hotel where 80 volunteers official organized SCCA.

The original campaign brought 403 adults and 126 students, with dues for

adults being \$6 and students \$3.

From this interest, hard work and enthusiasm about bringing professional artists to our area, we are still alive and well and continuing the original goal.

We began with all volunteer board members, by-laws were established and continue today. The Articles of Incorporation as a non-profit organization were granted in 1983.

In 1954, Pfeiffer College, at that time, joined with us and we formed a joint relationship between community and higher education which strengthened the organization for 35 years, with Pfeiffer hosting many of the concerts and thou-

sands of school students being brought to the gym for the shows.

In 1989, the Stanly County Agri-Civic Center was completed and became the permanent home for the concert association — and what a blessing. From that time, we have had season membership and individual tickets locally and to surrounding counties.

We joined the NC Presenters Consortium in 2001 to become a part of this organization which helps us to bring the best artists with educational outreach as one of our major goals.

Over the years, we have had the best— Ferrante & Teicher; the North Carolina,



A version of *The Ink Spots* performed songs from the group's popular hits from the 1930s and 1940s for the SCCA. (Photo by B.J. DRYE)

Greensboro and Charlotte symphonies; Mickey Rooney; music of Les Brown, Benny Goodman, Guy Lombardo, military bands, jazz, country, folk, blues, big bands and famous shows throughout the world. Our goal is to bring music of all interests, groups with local musicians, and make this available for students as a part of our educational goal.

gratitude goes to the county, dedicated Board of Directors, local media sources, individuals and businesses who support SCCA beyond single tickets. Continued financial support enables us to keep the cost at reasonable prices so that our citizens of all ages can be a part of this opportunity.

Our website is www.stanlyconcert.com.

As we celebrate 75 years, a debt of

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Stanly County Chorale brings voices together for common goal

Contributed

The Stanly County Chorale was formed in September 1968 under the direction of William “Bill” McGibney, minister of music at First Baptist Church in Albemarle. The Chorale was accompanied by Mary Hearne. The first concert was presented on Dec. 8, 1968, in the Albemarle High School gymnasium, with 49 singers representing 20 churches. The group performed the Christmas section of Handel’s “Messiah.”

Since that time, the Chorale’s goal has been to present at least two concert programs each year; one during the fall/Christmas season and another in the spring.

The upcoming Spring 2024 season will be a continuation of our 55th anniversary celebration. “A Musical Memoir” will be presented April 27-28.

The Chorale will revisit some of our favorite music, as well as present some new pieces. All former directors and accompanists of the Chorale will be



honored, and several will participate in the performances.

The Chorale is excited to make a

special guest appearance on the Stanly County Concert Band performance April 25. It will perform along with the

band to present two pieces.

For more information visit <http://stanlychorale.org>.

The Talent Company inspires the next generation of theater

Contributed

The Talent Company is a non-profit organization committed to educating the youth of Stanly County and surrounding communities in all aspects of theater production while nurturing creative expression, self confidence, inclusion, teamwork and an appreciation for the arts. Over the years The Talent Company has continued its goal of performing high-quality musical and non-musical productions with an emphasis on student growth.

This group was founded by youth backstage on the set of The Uwharrie

Players’ production of “South Pacific” in 2005. Their dream was to create an organization that would allow them to participate in all parts of a musical production including direction, set design, choreography, sound and lighting design. Founding youth members are Rebekah Asycue, Jordi Coats, Staley Story and Kristen Throneburg. The company’s first show premiered on Dec. 3, 2005 at the First Presbyterian Church of Albemarle, to a crowd of over 200 people. In February 2020, the cast of Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast” performed at the Stanly County Agri Civic Center to a crowd of over a thousand at their Sunday matinee.



The cast of “CLUE: On Stage” in November 2023. From left: Sadie Wally, Riley Morton, Keely Beane, Rae White, Milo Snyder, Silas Almond and Zac Baker.



Lou Donaldson celebrates the renaming of a stretch of N.C. Highway 740 in his honor on Oct. 14, 2022. Donaldson, 97, is a Badin native, who became a jazz legend, recording on the famed Blue Note label. Popular songs by the alto saxophonist include "Blues Walk" and "Alligator Bugaloo." (FILE)



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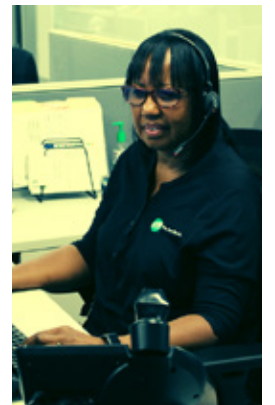


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Uwharrie Youth Arts and City Youth Ballet nurture the performing arts

Contributed

Since its founding in 1998, Uwharrie Youth Arts (UYA) has played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of the performing arts among young people in Stanly and surrounding counties. As an umbrella organization, Uwharrie Youth Arts has been instrumental in supporting and promoting the activities of City Youth Ballet and Playtime Children's Theatre, thereby enriching the cultural landscape of the region.

The genesis of Uwharrie Youth Arts

Uwharrie Youth Arts was established with a clear mission: to increase awareness and involvement in the performing arts among the youth. Over the years, UYA has educated and entertained, making significant contributions to the community. Its impact is evident in the thousands of young people who have participated in its productions, workshops and local performances.

City Youth Ballet: A beacon of ballet in Stanly County

City Youth Ballet, supported by Uwharrie Youth Arts, made its mark in 1998 with its first presentation of "The Nutcracker" in Stanly County. Initially an annual event from 1998 to 2002, this production shifted to a biennial schedule, gracing the stage of the Stanly County Agri-Civic Center.

Hundreds of youth from Stanly and neighboring counties have since participated in this full-length ballet, showcasing their talents and passion.

Making ballet accessible

City Youth Ballet artistic director Leigh Roush developed the program with a commitment to making ballet accessible. The program offers free school performances to all Stanly County Schools students, allowing roughly 3,000 children each year to witness the magic of the Nutcracker without any cost.

Every student receives a complimentary ticket for public performances, provided they are accompanied by a paying adult. This initiative, supported by fundraising campaigns, ensures that professional-level ballet is accessible to all.



Alydia Wheeler performs a scene from "The Nutcracker."



Thora Kilde performs for the City Youth Ballet.

The Nutcracker: A regional favorite

Thanks to the support of local busi-

nesses and individuals, City Youth Ballet stages a full-scale production of "The Nutcracker," complete with professional costumes, sets and special effects. The inclusion of professional guest artists offers young performers a glimpse into the life of a professional dancer, enriching their experience. This production has become a holiday tradition for locals and visitors from across the Southeast.

UYA/CYB: Beyond performance

UYA/CYB's commitment extends beyond performance. They offer apprenticeships in various aspects of production, such as stage design, technical direction and costuming, under professional guidance. This holistic approach to performing arts education ensures that young individuals are exposed to all facets of production, not just the spotlight.

Albemarle Academy of Dance:

The official school

Albemarle Academy of Dance is the

founding and official school of Uwharrie Youth Arts; However, participation in UYA events is open to all interested individuals, with a guarantee that everyone who auditions for a production will be cast in some capacity, ensuring inclusivity and opportunity for all.

Uwharrie Youth Arts: A commitment to the arts

Since its inception, Uwharrie Youth Arts has remained steadfast in its dedication to enhancing the involvement of youth in the performing arts. It strives to connect and engage youth, educators and families to the performing arts in innovative, meaningful and participatory ways.

In conclusion, Uwharrie Youth Arts and City Youth Ballet, with their diverse programs and inclusive approach, continue to be beacons of artistic opportunity and education in the region, nurturing the next generation of performing artists and audiences alike.



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Stanly County Concert Band hits the right notes

Contributed

The Stanly County Concert Band came from an idea two friends, James Cotton and Stephanie Zunino, had to provide an opportunity for those who played band instruments to play again.

In the spring of 2012, a group began to meet to create the band. The original members who became the board of directors were James Cotton, Stephanie Zunino, Tim Hedrick, Carmella Hedrick, Frank Poolos, Doug Craig, Walt Summerlin and Dr. David Kirby from Pfeiffer University. Over the next six months, they toiled away to set up the band as a non-profit and decide the direction they wanted to go.

In addition, the Stanly County Concert Band also wanted to offer the citizens of Stanly County and the area free or low-cost concerts at least twice a year. The band partnered with Pfeiffer University which supplied rehearsal and performance space, large instruments and an extensive music library. It became a performance vehicle for Pfeiffer



Tim and Carmella Hedrick and Frank Poolos are conductors of the band. They have taught at various levels for many years.

University students.

Unfortunately, David Kirby, who had been very instrumental in the Pfeiffer connection, passed away before the band was officially started. The first concert in November 2012 was dedicated in his memory.

Since 2012, the band has grown to

around 50 members and has performed two to four times every year. All early concerts were performed at Pfeiffer University in the chapel.

In November 2013, the Stanly County Concert Association sponsored the band's first themed concert, "A John Williams Tribute," at the Stanly Coun-

ty Agri-Civic Center. The concert was a success and spurred the band's move to performing almost exclusively at the Agri-Civic Center.

Musical programs of the Stanly County Concert Band range from classic concert band literature, contemporary works for wind band and jazz to popular music for themed and holiday concerts. The band currently presents four to five performances each year. A highlight of this past year was being a part of a fundraising event in Montgomery County to aid Ukranian families. Approximately \$30,000 was raised at the event.

With continued support from the community, Pfeiffer University, The Stanly County Arts Council, Uwharrie Bank and the Stanly County Concert Association, the Stanly County Concert Band strives to provide opportunities to anyone 18 years old and older to continue enjoying the gift of music for a lifetime.

The Stanly County Concert Band is a self-sustaining, non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization relying on donations and grants to fund its activities.

Singing Americans of Stanly County brings choral music to the masses

Contributed

For nearly 50 years, the Singing Americans of Stanly County has been bringing choral music to audiences in the county and beyond.

Back in 1975, as the United States began preparations to celebrate its 200th year, several Stanly County choral leaders had the idea to gather choir members for a musical tribute to this country. They chose a musical called "I Love America" and in 1976 close to 100 singers from many Stanly County churches joined together for a performance.

For the next several years, these musicians and new singers kept coming together to share "I Love America."

The Singing Americans would grow to more than 125 members and would make several trips to share patriotic concerts around the region and Washington, D.C.

As time moved on, the singers would



add regular Christmas concerts, new patriotic anthems and Easter musicals. There were concerts in the Stanly County Agri-Civic Center and in churches and theaters throughout Stanly County and beyond.

Today, the Singing Americans remain

a group of singers who enjoy preparing patriotic and Christmas concerts.

In the spring of 2024, the Singing Americans will gather for its 48th year to prepare a patriotic concert to share this summer. Practices will start in April and are at Grace Baptist Church off Old

Salisbury Road in Albemarle. Current leaders are Pat McLendon, president; Claudette Burris, board chair; Norma Early, Craig Taylor and Joseph Helms, board members; and Bob Remsburg, director.

New members are always welcome.

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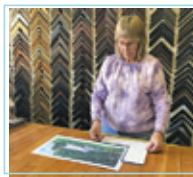
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The West Stanly Players: Over five decades of excellence in the arts

Contributed

Theatre at West Stanly High School has a rich history and has been an important part of the curriculum and the identity of West Stanly since it first opened in 1962. Countless students have passed across the stage in the theatre over the past 60 years, many of whom have gone on to professional careers in the entertainment industry.

The history of WSHS theatre began in 1963 with the production of “Jane Eyre,” directed by Romana Bennet and starring Judy Coble. At the time, drama productions were produced by the senior class. This tradition continued throughout the 1960s. Under the direction of Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Holbrooks students performed musicals like “Oklahoma!,” “Carousel” and others.

In 1970, seeing a need for a full-time theatre and speech teacher, the administration at West Stanly reached out to James D. Kennedy.

Kennedy, who was born in Stanly County, had already been teaching in the system and had produced plays at both Stanfield and Locust schools. Before coming back to Stanly to teach, Kennedy had been an accomplished actor, making a name for himself on stages all over North Carolina and beyond.

Upon arriving at West Stanly, Mr. Kennedy immediately made an impact. His goal was to continue the tradition set in the 60s, but to challenge students to go beyond the boundaries of the small town. He established a class, offering both speech and drama, and created a club dedicated to theatre and the arts. Thus, the West Stanly Players were born. Kennedy’s first production, the moving drama “Flowers for Algernon,” quickly established the level of perfection the players would become associated with for decades to come. It also set a pattern for students using what they learned in class and on stage to forge a career.

Ken Eudy, who starred in “Flowers for Algernon,” went on to become well-known from coast to coast as a newscaster.

Students would continue that tradition of following their dreams and using



James D. Kennedy was founder of The West Stanly Players.

that drive for success that Kennedy instilled in them.

Although Kennedy had only planned to stay a few years at West Stanly before returning to his acting career, he quickly learned that he had found his calling. For the next 26 years students flocked to his classes to learn from the master and audiences filled the theatre to see what magic he would bring to stage next.

Musicals like “Hello Dolly,” “The King and I,” “The Music Man” and “West Side Story” wowed audiences

while dramatic pieces like “Picnic,” “Our Town” and “Steel Magnolias” left them questioning that they were still in a high school.

Kennedy achieved his goals by never settling for mediocrity, demanding perfection and setting a standard for professionalism not associated with any other high school before or since. Students were given the opportunity to work hand and hand with theatre professionals, learning their craft and passing it along to the next generation.

Kennedy retired from West Stanly in 1997, but the legacy that he began in 1970 still remains today with former student Wes Tucker, now in his 27th year as director of the Players. Today the Players produce three shows a year — a Christmas show or dinner theatre in the fall, a student-driven arts celebration in the winter and their big-budget, main stage production in the spring.

Although Kennedy passed away in 2006, his words, wisdom and passion for the arts are passed on every time the theatre doors open.

The West Stanly Players constantly strive to push students to their full potential, to always climb to reach the top of the mountain and to continue the tradition.

Here are just a few former West Stanly Players working professionally in entertainment:

- JD Hart - Professional actor, singer, writer, producer;
- George Smart - Former professional Broadway performer, (“Phantom of the Opera”);
- Dionne Osborne - Professional vocal coach (Drake);
- Charles Johnson - Professional set designer, resident set designer Cape Fear Regional Theatre, college professor at Elon University;
- Eric Norbury - Broadway lighting designer;
- Chris Herring - Professional actor (LA);
- Andrew Enloe - Professional actor (LA), movie production crew;
- Chandler Black - Broadway technical director;
- Victor Bercher - Professional theatrical make-up artist;
- Davey Troublefield - Professional film and TV make-up artist (LA);
- Josh Jones - Filmmaker (Chicago); and
- Matt Slater, Chris Whittle, Ryan Furr - touring lighting designers and technicians.

“In the coming tomorrows, when the final curtain falls, the player will share the company of three noble companions—truth, beauty and art.”

— James D. Kennedy, founder of the West Stanly Players

Bluegrass is in the Hatley blood

Contributed

The Hatley Family of Stanfield represents five generations of music. The bluegrass/gospel group consists of a father, his four children and one daughter-in-law.

Patriarch 87-year-old Ervin Hatley has been playing the fiddle for more than half a century and continues to perform when able. His three sons, Gary, Ronnie and Donnie, play guitar, banjo and mandolin/fiddle, respectively, while daughter, Teresa, joins in on bass and Gary's wife, Sandy, adds dobro on some numbers.

Growing up singing a cappella in church, the group is known for its tight four-part harmony. The group specializes in bluegrass gospel, but also offers instrumentals and bluegrass standards.

The family began playing when the two oldest boys were teenagers.

Competing in area fiddlers' conventions and band contests, they were frequent winners. As their popularity spread and the younger siblings joined in, they started performing for festivals, concert halls and churches. They have



The Hatley Family is one of the most celebrated bluegrass bands in the county.

appeared across the Southeast from West Virginia to Mississippi.

Ronnie owns Ron's Pickin' Parlor, where he and sister, Teresa, teach in-

strumental and vocal lessons full-time. The business also offers bluegrass instruments for sale.

This year, the Hatleys celebrate 43

years performing together as a family band. They have recorded four CDs, two bluegrass gospel, one a cappella gospel and one Bluegrass Christmas project.

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Huneycutt's contributions to culture, community



John Huneycutt has found success as an artist, photographer and graphic designer.

Contributed

John Huneycutt's life story is a rich tapestry of artistic passion, community engagement and global recognition.

A Stanly County native, John has not only made a significant impact on his local community but has also earned international art recognition. His journey is a compelling narrative of how local roots can fuel a journey to global prominence in art.

Early beginnings and educational pursuits

John's artistic voyage began in the classrooms of Stanfield Elementary and West Stanly High School, where his initial fascination with the visual world was nurtured. These formative years in Stanly County's educational institutions provided not just a foundation in the arts but also instilled a sense of community and belonging. The leap to higher education saw John graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Wingate University in 2004, setting the stage for a distinguished career in photography.

Huneycutt Photography and Beyond

For over 20 years, John has captured the essence of Stanly County and beyond through his lens, establishing Huneycutt Photography as a beacon for aspiring artists. His work has not only celebrated the beauty of his immediate environment

but has also been showcased in esteemed galleries from Venice, Italy, Los Angeles, Scottsdale and Manhattan. This global recognition includes accolades in juried shows worldwide and the prestigious North Carolina Artist's Fellowship Grant from the North Carolina Arts Council—a testament to his exceptional talent and contributions to the arts.

A seamless blend of art and corporate innovation

John's move to become the digital media coordinator at Union Power Cooperative represented a pivotal shift in his career, seamlessly merging the realms of artistry and the corporate world. With in this role, he has adeptly utilized his creative abilities to foster innovation, strengthen community ties and underscore creativity's critical role in various industries.

Moreover, his exceptional work in this capacity has been recognized with several awards, highlighting his contributions to innovative solutions and community engagement. John considers himself exceptionally fortunate to be part of Union Power Cooperative. This remarkable company stands apart from investor-owned entities by prioritizing the welfare of its members and the broader community. This opportunity to align his artistic vision with the cooperative's member-first philosophy has been gratifying. Allowing him to contribute



meaningfully, reflecting the cooperative's core values and commitment to community service.

A heartfelt project: honoring Ted

In a deeply personal endeavor, John is seeking local corporate sponsors and patrons to support the arts in Stanly County and honor the memory of Ted, a cherished citizen of Oakboro.

The goal is to commission a nationally-known sculptor to create a life-sized bronze sculpture and have it placed prominently on the very streets he so often walked, serving as a lasting tribute to Ted's spirit and his profound impact on his community.

"Ted meant so much to the citizens of Oakboro and Stanly County; he was beloved by so many of us. He was a uni-

fying figure and a testament to what is beautiful about life, and I think it's important that we not only honor his legacy but remind ourselves of this beauty in our own lives. I urge anyone interested to call me personally at 704-984-3152," he said.

This initiative reflects John's profound commitment to his roots and the people who have profoundly shaped his life and career.

A legacy of creativity and community engagement

John Huneycutt's artistic journey is a powerful testament to the impact of art on both a personal and community level. From his early days in Stanly County to his recognition as an internationally celebrated photographer, John



has remained deeply connected to his community.

Alongside his family, John continues to live and create in Oakboro, embodying the essence of a dedicated artist and family man.

Stanly County has always been a fertile ground for art and creativity, where the seeds of imagination are sown in the rich soil of community and heritage.

“As someone who has witnessed and contributed to its vibrant cultural landscape, I am profoundly optimistic about the future of our great county. The unwavering support and appreciation for the arts here serve as a beacon of hope, promising that Stanly County will continue to be a haven where creativity flourishes. This enduring commitment to nur-

ture artistic talent ensures that the cultural fabric of our community remains vibrant and dynamic. I look forward to seeing how the next chapters of Stanly County’s artistic journey unfold, confident that it will remain a place where the arts thrive and enrich the lives of all who call it home.”

Through Huneycutt Photography, his innovative work at Union Power Cooperative and his heartfelt efforts to honor Ted, John exemplifies the critical role of creativity in enriching our lives and communities. His story vividly illustrates the enduring value of art, the importance of community support and the remarkable influence of individuals dedicated to making a difference through their craft and compassion.

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PROGRESS EDITION 39

Craig has always been drawn to art

Contributed

Tony Craig is an artist, photographer and cartoonist who grew up in Albemarle before heading west in 1989 to follow his dream of working for the Walt Disney Company. Along the way he spent two years at the California Institute of the Arts studying character animation and design before being hired into the animation industry, not as expected at Disney, but at Warner Brothers on the original iteration of “Tiny Toon Adventures.” However, he soon moved to the Disney company to work as an inbetween animator on “The Rescuers Down Under” before returning to Warner to storyboard on “Animaniacs.” Next he moved on to Hanna-Barbera for a two year period, finally returning to Disney’s television animation unit as executive producer/director on “The Lion King’s Timon and Pumbaa,” “101 Dalmatians” (TV series), “House of Mouse,” “Lilo and Stitch” (TV series), two video sequels to “Lilo and Stitch” and “Mickey Mouse Clubhouse.” Notable figures in the industry Tony was able to work with and meet were Maurice Noble, Chuck Jones, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera, Gene Kelly and Walt Disney’s nephew Roy E. Disney. In 2008, Tony returned to North Carolina and began devoting more time to his own artwork and continuing to freelance in the animation industry.

Tony has spent hundreds of hours driving the back roads of the state looking for relics of days gone by, such as old country stores, vintage signs, barns, milling companies and other landmarks. After capturing them with his camera, he creates watercolor portraits of these places, which can be found in museum and corporate collections across America and www.tonycraig.art.

Recent projects included working with Disney Asia on a new Stitch series (from Lilo and Stitch fame), Cartoon Network’s “Craig of the Creek” and “Jessica’s Big Little World” and Warner Brothers’ “Scooby Doo Guess Who” and the reboot of “Animaniacs.”

Tony’s mother and father, Sylvia and the late Douglas Craig, were musicians who taught middle school and high school band, respectively, in the western part of Stanly County from the 1970s to the early 1990s. Douglas Craig also was a member of the Stanly County Concert Band, playing baritone and French horn. He passed in 2022.



Above: Tony Craig had a career with Disney before striking out on his own creative ventures.



Left: His father, Doug Craig, pictured, and mother Sylvia were band teachers in Stanly County Schools and involved with the Stanly County Concert Band.



John Thomas Williams Jr., right, and his sons John “Jack” T. Williams III and Eli M. Williams

Family uses a large canvas

Contributed

John Thomas Williams Jr., along with his sons John “Jack” T. Williams III and Eli M. Williams, is a notable local artist with a passion for art and architecture that runs in the family. John’s artistic journey began in childhood, and he honed his skills through private art lessons in downtown Albemarle. He pursued his love for art and architecture by majoring in art and art education at Wingate College. Over the span of 30 years, he dedicated himself to teaching

art in Stanly County, fostering a love for the subject in many students.

During his teaching career, John developed a deep interest in historic restoration, actively participating in the restoration of homes and buildings in downtown Albemarle. In 1999, he embarked on his first major art installation at the Boardroom Bar and Bistro, contributing to the design and overseeing the restoration process. His artistic talents were showcased in 16 large-scale paintings for the main bar area. Additionally, he created an annual Santa print for eight years.

Both of John’s sons, Jack and Eli, followed in their father’s artistic footsteps by majoring in art. Jack graduated from UNCW, while Eli pursued his art education at UNC. Together, they founded WMS Brothers, a company dedicated to restoring ghost signs, creating new signs and producing murals. Their work is prominently featured in various counties, including Stanly, Anson, Cabarrus and Montgomery. Eli even has a mural on Franklin Street in Chapel Hill.

The family’s current project involves the restoration of a 1929 Sinclair

Gas Station, which will serve as a home and studio. John’s impact as an art educator is evident in the success of his students, many of whom have entered the art profession as designers, graphic artists, tattoo artists and more.

Nicole Williams plays a crucial role as the driving force behind her husband and sons, contributing to the family’s success by handling marketing and keeping them on schedule. Together, the Williams family continues to leave a lasting legacy in the local art scene, combining their artistic talents and passion for restoration.



"The Tell-Tale Heart," adapted and directed by James Cotton, was filmed in 2014 and released in 2015. It starred Stephanie Cronley and Lisa Ewers. (Photo by James Cotton)

Cotton hones film, theatrical craft

Contributed

James Cotton is a Stanly County native who has been active in the arts community for almost 30 years. He has been in many Uwharrie Players productions starting in 1997 with "Guys and Dolls," then "Grease" in 1998, "Cotton Patch Gospel" in 2002, "The Boys Next Door" in 2007, "Dearly Departed" in 2011, "Twelve Angry Men" in 2012, "The Curious Savage" in 2016 and "The Odd Couple" in 2022. He directed the 2003 productions of "The Diary of Anne Frank" and "The Rainmaker" as well as the 2010 production of "Smoke on the Mountain." More recently he directed the 2021 production of "I'm Dying to Be in the Choir" and the 2023 production of "Down to Earth."

James has served on the UP board

of directors multiple times, including during 2020 helping to keep the organization going during the lockdown by directing "The Virtual Family," a video play released online. He was instrumental in many UP radio shows as technical director and appeared in a few. Starting in 2018, James began designing and building sets for the UP, building "Drinking Habits" and "Cinderella" in 2018, "Let Him Sleep Til It's Time for His Funeral" in 2019, "I'm Dying to Be in the Choir" and "Blithe Spirit" in 2021, "The Odd Couple" and "The Diary of Anne Frank" in 2022 and "Down to Earth" and "Bright Star" in 2023. James has won several Uwharrie Players awards including Favorite Character Actor for "Grease," the Joan Giglio Award in 2021, Favorite Show for "I'm Dying to Be in the Choir" in 2021 and Best Actor and Favorite Comic Performance for "The

Odd Couple" in 2022.

James is also an award winning filmmaker. In 2005 James moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada to attend Vancouver Film School. Since returning from film school, James has produced several short films. He wrote, co-produced, was director of photography and director for the short film "Violet" that was at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival in France. In 2013, he co-produced, wrote and directed the short film "One Man's Poison," a 1930s crime noir film shot entirely in Albemarle. This film went on to win the President's Choice award at the 2015 North Carolina Film Awards. Next, James adapted and directed a short film version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" shot at the Marks House in Albemarle. This film screened at the Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival in New York City and won several

awards including the President's Choice award in the 2015 North Carolina Film Awards and The Award of Merit at the 2016 Accolade Global Film Competition. The film also won the Award of Merit for Lead Actress and Award of Recognition for Supporting Actress. Since 2016, James has participated in the 48 Hour Film Project in Charlotte five times both producing and directing.

One of James' happiest achievements in the arts in Stanly County is the founding of the Stanly County Concert Band for which he was president for the first several years of the organization's existence. The SCCB just celebrated its 10th anniversary. He has played tenor sax and bass clarinet in the concert band for almost the entire 10 years.

James is working on several film projects he hopes to see happen in the near future.



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