

Love weathers all storms



by Megan Schiffres

*N*ot even a hurricane could stop the wedding of Britney and Alexander Crittenden, who said ‘I do’ on the banks of the Piankatank River just two days after Hurricane Michael, which had been downgraded to a tropical storm as it swept through Virginia.

Britney and Alexander awoke the day after the storm devastated parts of the region to find their wedding tent ripped in half and their wedding venue completely without power.

The couple met when they were both just 15 years old, at the Kilmarnock DMV where they were taking the learner’s permit test. They’ve been together for eight years, since their senior year of high school, and were engaged for a year-and-a-half before they were married on October 13, 2018.

After over a year of preparing for their special day, of finalizing seating plans, precisely making a wedding timeline, and carefully crafting every little detail with a unique style that they hoped would convey their love for each other, Britney’s

and Alexander’s plans were blown away, along with everything else the storm swept up in its path.

“It was complete chaos,” said Britney. “I had everything perfected, everything paid for, everything was done. And then the most unfortunate thing of course happens and it throws a wrench in all of your plans. So we actually, on our wedding day, we ran off of six generators and our tent tore in half the day before we got married.”

Despite the weather, the lack of power at the wedding site, and the torn tent, their wedding turned out to be a beautiful celebration. Thanks to the quick replacement of the tent by Grand Rentals in Gloucester, a little help setting up the ceremony from their family and friends, and the fact that theirs was one of the only houses in Deltaville still with power, everything fell perfectly into place just in time for the ceremony.

“Until I actually walked down the aisle that day I had no idea what everything was going to look like. I had, of course, this mental picture of what it was supposed to look like before the hurricane hit and

*Alexander
& Britney*

Providence Plantation in Deltaville
October 13, 2018



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so then when I actually came down the aisle it was like, oh my God! It's perfect! It was a miracle, quite literally, that it all came together like it did," Britney said.

Britney and Alexander were married on the banks of the Piankatank at Providence Plantation in Deltaville, under an arch draped in eucalyptus leaves and between two enormous bouquets of white flowers. Britney wore a stunning floor-length white lace dress and her lace veil, which reached down to brush the grass lightly behind her as she stepped down the aisle, floated gently in the wind as the couple said their vows.

They were married by Alexander's uncle, Quigg Lawrence of the Church of the Holy Spirit, who recited the traditional wedding day verse, Corinthians 13:3-8, which begins with the proclamation that "love is patient." The couple exchanged simple vows before their gathered guests, both holding back tears, before sealing their union with a kiss.

"The most exciting part, what I was truly looking forward to is that moment when you actually say I do and all that stress and planning leading up to that is all gone," Britney said. "Ya'll did it! You're walking up the aisle, all your favor-

ite people are there cheering for you! You've somehow pulled off this beautiful wedding and now you get to go and enjoy all these people that came to see you and actually enjoy being man and wife."

The food for their reception, which was catered by Scoot's BBQ in Gloucester, was cooked using a car generator and the cupcakes they served had to be made in the home of the baker, Michelle Carpenter, because her bakery was without power. However, according to Britney, once the party started none of the guests could tell anything had gone awry.

"A lot of people, once we were at the wedding, had no idea that everything was running off generators or that anything had been messed up. I mean looking at the wedding you were like, man, this went so smooth but in reality it really didn't," she said.

Some 272 people came to their wedding, and were served pulled barbecue, chicken, mac and cheese, green beans, crab dip, fruit trays, and a mashed potato bar at the recep-



tion, which featured a rowboat filled with ice and refreshments. The decor was minimal and clean, with starch white table clothes and vases of hydrangeas covering every available surface. The couple were striving for an upscale rustic vibe, not too country but not too stiff, and found a nice balance. Their cocktail tables were actually enormous wooden spools used by electric companies to store wire, and the cake table was just two barrels with a piece of cut wood stuck on top. “I kind of always thought I was going to go for this country rustic but I was trying to get away from the cut wood and Mason jars, so I went with a more galvanized look,” Britney said.

The couple ended their celebration with a spectacular fireworks display over the river, and their send-off by friends and family featured an aisle of sparklers that lit their faces in the gathering darkness by the riverside.

Looking back, Britney said she was surprised at how quickly the day passed.

“You stress building up all those little details but when you’re in the moment, everything goes by so fast,” she said. “It’s like a whirlwind. It’s almost like you black out through the whole experience. It’s unreal because it feels like it’s literally a fairytale happened and you’re like, oh my God, this is my life!”



Vendors

- Makeup** - Laci Fore Makeup Artistry
- Tent** - Grand Rentals
- Videography** - Riverside 24 Productions
- Photos** - Ashley Petersen Photography
- Caterer** - Scoot's BBQ
- Flowers** - Susan Valencia
- Dress** - Blush Bridal
- Bridesmaid's dresses** - Tiffany's Bridal
- Cupcakes** - Michelle's Sweet Treats
- Wedding rings** - Burkes Fine Jewelers
- DJ** - Superior Entertainment Group
- Hair** - Avenue 42 Salon



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Britney



Christmas GREETINGS



Illuminating Irvington:

Holiday display is a 'hobby' in progress

by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Tucked in a wooded area behind the Irvington Post Office, the residence of Linda Gaskins and Maurice "Mo" Luckham is missed by passing motorists on most days. But this time of year, it's hard to drive by and not take a second look.

Thousands of twinkling lights and illuminated blowups have turned her yard into a winter wonderland.

The lane to Gaskins's house at 4499 Irvington Road is sandwiched between the parking lots of the post office and Select Properties of Virginia.

The first decoration greeting visitors is a lighted nativity scene.

"We've done all this," said Linda, waving her arm at the yard. "But we want to focus on Jesus first. That is what Christmas is all about."

The nativity includes two antique white resin camels, which Linda and Mo bought last summer at a yard sale in Chesapeake.

"I think they're pretty old," said Linda. "I had to have them when I saw them."

The two collect decorations all year long, shopping at flea markets, thrift stores and estate and yard sales. Several of their pieces were acquired at sales in Chesapeake, where they frequently visit family.



Linda Gaskins and Maurice Luckham have hundreds of decorations in their Irvington yard but say the nativity scene is their favorite. Photos by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

"If I see a yard sale with Christmas decorations listed, I go," said Linda.

The two have on display over 6,000 lights,

11 illuminated blowups, including Frosty, an elf, an archway, Christmas tree, Grinch and a lighthouse. There's also about a dozen

lighted wire figurines.

"And every week we say we're not buying anymore and we come home with more," said Linda.

The couple said the display remains a work in progress since they buy on a whim and decorate a little more each day.

Mo still works and Linda works part time so it takes the two a couple weeks of decorating in their spare time to get the display completed. Last year's display was about half as big, said Linda. And next year, it will likely be even bigger.

"He's the mastermind here," said Linda.

"I'm just along for the ride."

The two also take Halloween decorating to an extreme and welcomed about 150 visitors two years ago when they started going big with the scary decor.

"Last year was the first year we went all out for Christmas," said Linda. "And we decided this year we're gonna up the game."

And their over-the-top decorating is worth visiting.

"Anybody's welcome," said Linda. "We tell people to drive on back here and get out and look around. We do it for the community to enjoy."

Linda and Mo will have the lights on from 5-9 p.m. nightly through New Year's Day.



The Potomac pilothouse:

Restoring a relic to tell the history of a bygone era in the Northern Neck

by Jackie Nunnery

Photos courtesy of Michael Geissinger

Walk into the Steamboat Era Museum in Irvington and you will see the Potomac pilothouse prominently displayed in its new surroundings. At first glance, it looks as if the museum was built around the structure. But looks, in this case, are deceiving. There was a whole lot of vision, skill, teamwork and a little bit of luck that brought the pilothouse to where it stands today.

The journey of the pilothouse from its beginnings in a Philadelphia shipyard to its final resting place in Irvington was long, circuitous and full of stops along the way, much like the routes of the steamboat that the pilothouse once stood on.

The story of the Potomac lines the wall alongside the pilothouse, with a flag it once flew. Built in 1894 for the Maryland and Virginia Steamboat Company, a newspaper account of the launch in The Philadelphia Times referred to it as “the most modern and handsomest steamer in Baltimore.” The steamboat traveled the Chesapeake Bay, and Potomac and Rappahannock rivers from Baltimore to Norfolk, with many Northern Neck points in between, carrying up to 100 passengers and 20 crew members at a time.

Its time as a steamer came to an end in 1936 when the Potomac collided with another ship in foggy weather near Seven Knolls Lighthouse, just outside Baltimore. The owners, not able to afford the necessary repairs to the hull and side, sold it to the Chesapeake Corporation in West Point. While at the Colonna Shipyard being converted to a pulpwood barge, the pilothouse was removed, and Ben and Willoughby Colonna brought it to White Stone to be used as a guest-house for visitors to their family’s Taft Beach Fish Factory.

In the ensuing decades, time was not kind to the pilothouse. Left abandoned, windows were broken and weather took its toll. The Mariners’ Museum took an interest in the structure, so it traveled to Newport News, and then later to Colo-

The pilothouse was hoisted over the museum and placed inside an opening in the rear of the building.

“It’s a huge project” requiring “about 4,500 skilled labor hours to do this. Every piece has to be touched and dealt with.”

— John Morgenthaler



nial Beach. But each new owner found the task of restoring the pilothouse too resource intensive.

In 2001, “the people who started this museum found out about it in Colonial Beach and moved it right there,” said John Morgenthaler, pointing to a patch of grass near the museum. Morgenthaler, a shipwright and cabinet maker by trade, has been restoring the pilothouse for the past few years.

Unfortunately, that patch of grass was not owned by the museum but the town of Irvington. And after years of waiting, they grew insistent that it find a new home off the Irvington Town Commons. Once again, the pilothouse was on the move. In 2010 it was shrink-wrapped and stored in White Stone for another five years until it arrived at Morgenthaler’s shop in Ophelia in 2015.

Morgenthaler grew up around boats and the water in Long Island, N.Y. His great-grandfather started a trim carpentry business in Brooklyn in the 1880s, but that was ending right about the time that Morgenthaler was born. That history initially discouraged Morgenthaler from pursuing the craft.

“I originally went to college, but it didn’t work out so well,” he said, with a laugh.

Eventually, Morgenthaler was drawn into the family tradition, spending the last 35 years working on both wood and fiberglass boats, specializing in interiors

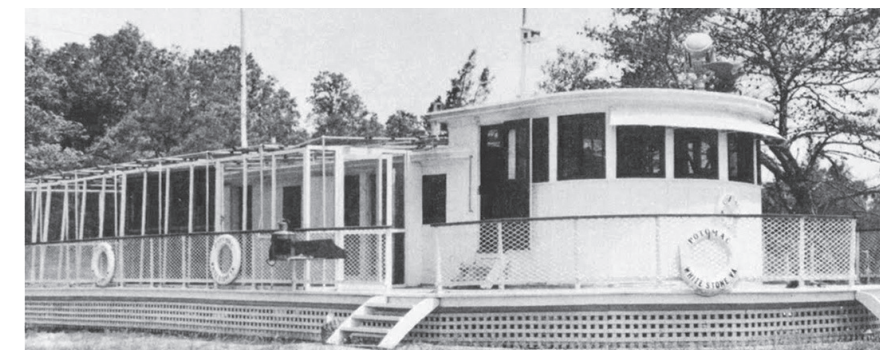
and trim work. He’s worked on boats of all types, but never a steamer and certainly not something in this condition.

“It’s a huge project” requiring “about 4,500 skilled labor hours to do this. Every piece has to be touched and dealt with,” Morgenthaler said. “The whole front had collapsed, the roof had collapsed, it was severely deteriorated.”

There was significant work to be done before even beginning the restoration process, like removing past inferior fixes, rotted wood and the back 15 feet of the pilothouse—2 crew cabins—so the structure would eventually fit in the museum.



The Potomac pilothouse and surrounding exhibits tell the story of steamers and their importance in moving people and products around the Northern Neck.



The Potomac pilothouse as a guest cottage on Taft Beach in White Stone.



The curved window sashes and trim of the wheelhouse have all been carefully rebuilt or restored by John Morgenthaler.