

Flying high

Courses prepare students to use drones to maximum effect

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — While drones may be fun gadgets to fly for hobbyists, a local college is offering classes to better prepare students to operate the unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) legally and safely while setting them up to use drones in professional settings.

Virginia Highlands Community College is offering a three-day Remote Airman Training course starting March 20 for anyone who wants to receive a license to fly a drone.

The test prep course is not a “how to fly a drone” opportunity but instead a course that teaches drone users how to pass the test to receive a license.

“The course teaches everything you need to know to pass the Part 107 FAA Drone Pilot Exam,” said Kevin Hamed, biology professor at the college and an instructor of the drone classes.

According to Hamed, even hobbyists can benefit from receiving their licenses.

“As a hobbyist, you are very limited on the airspace you can fly within. Recreational drones can’t fly within 5 miles of an airport. So the benefit of having a license is being able to fly in more areas.”

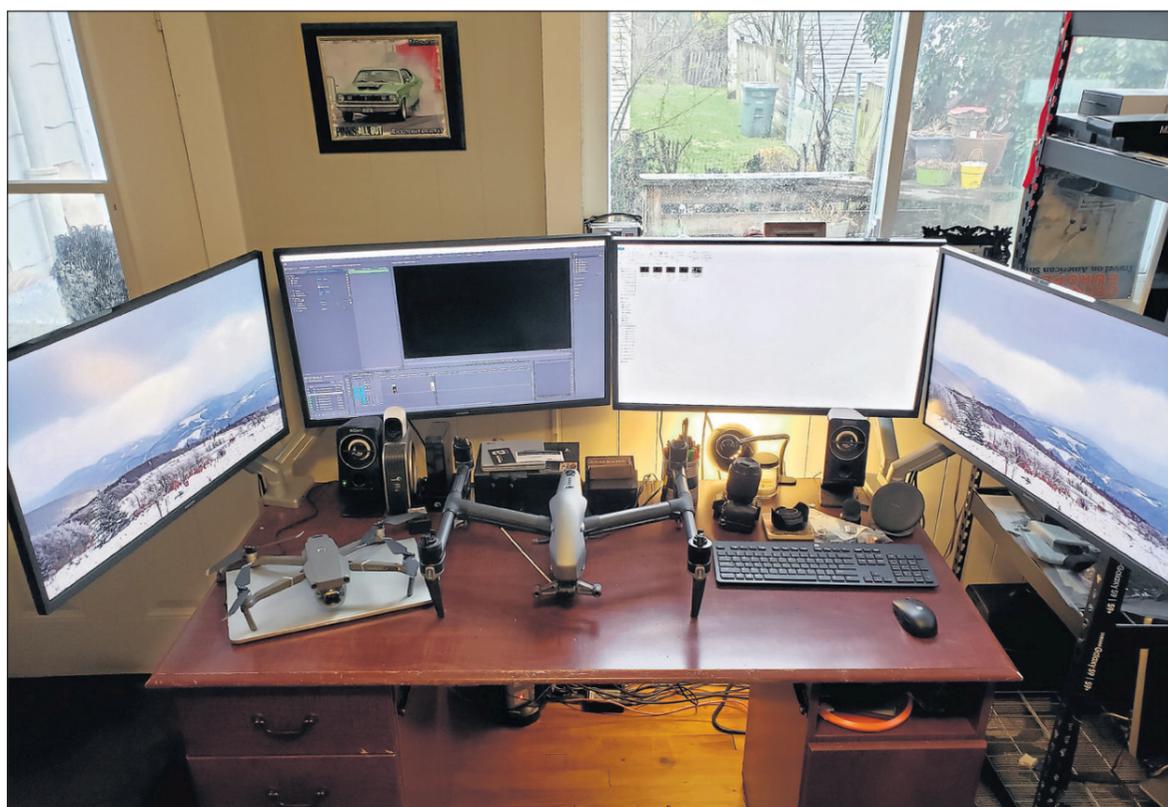
The drone revolution is soaring throughout the world and right here in Southwest Virginia, said Hamed.

“We know that Amazon already has test markets where they are doing delivery service nationwide. They’re already delivering in the United Kingdom,” said Hamed.

“UPS is doing some amazing trials, too, where they have drone and drivers working together — basically doubling the number of packages they can deliver in a day.

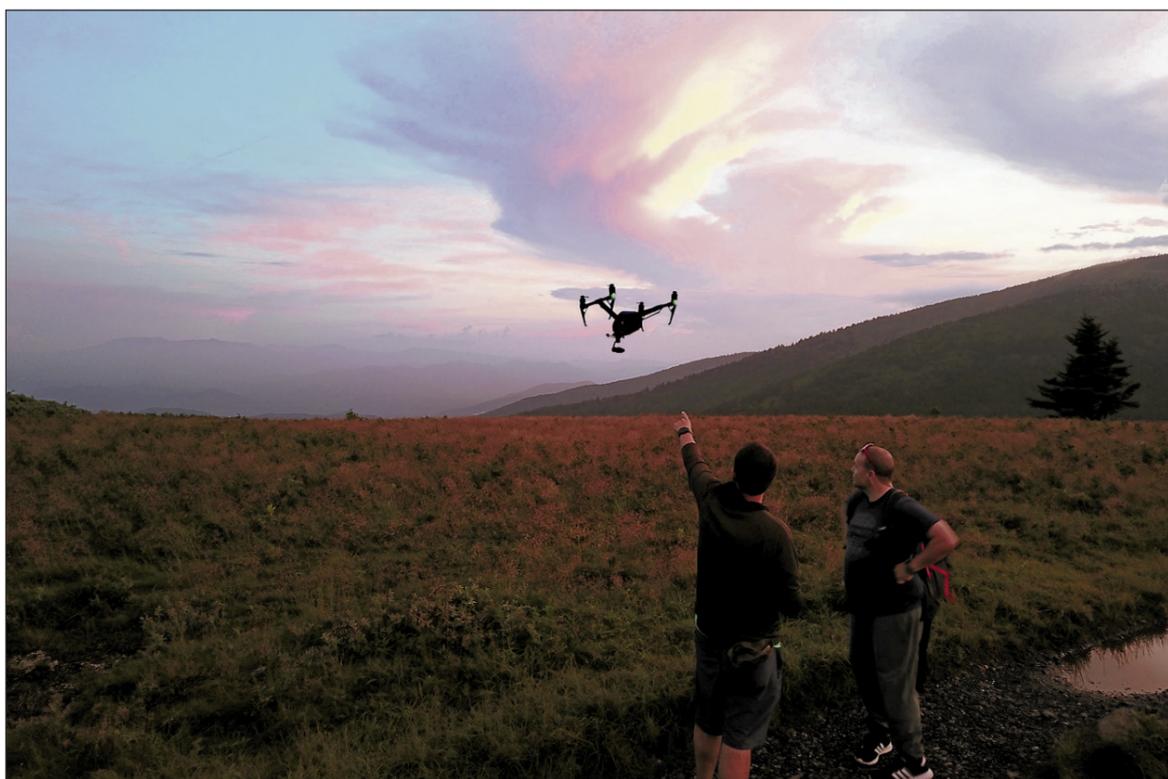
“So we’re going to see drones used in many applications.

“Anyone thinking about a career in natural resources, engineering, city planning and the



Mark Poe's base of operations for his drone business allows him enough hardware to handle massive photo files that his clients can use for advertising or 3D modeling.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



Matt Poe (left), owner of Poe Media & Solutions in Bristol, Virginia, and Josh Kestner fly a drone against a sunset sky in Roan Mountain, Tennessee.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

military needs experience with drones because in the next five to 10 years, drones are going to be absolutely everywhere,” he said. “For a young person, getting these skills is only going to make them more competitive in a

very competitive work environment.”

The test prep classes started in 2017 at the community college with help from Virginia Tech to get started. “Virginia Tech has been essential in the success of our pro-

gram,” said Hamed, who, along with co-instructor Tamara Lasley, received training from the school.

He estimated as many as 80 local students have enrolled in the courses at Virginia Highlands Community College.

Hamed said the classes will cover FAA regulations all drone users should know.

The professor said a license is required for any activity that could be construed as a commercial, moneymaking activity.

“For example, a friend may ask you to take photos with your drone at their family reunion in the backyard. If they invite you to have dinner with them in exchange for the photos, the FAA considers that you’ve been compensated for flying,” explained Hamed.

“Technically, you’re in violation of the law because you flew a commercial mission without a license.”

During the training, participants will review the five main testing areas, including Regulations, National Airspace System, Weather, Loading/Performance and Operations, as well as other information that pertains to commercial operations of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) under FAA Part 107. Class members will have the opportunity to take practice tests, as well as participate in planning a UAS mission and conducting hands-on indoor test flights.

Teacher sharing knowledge

Drones already are being used for military operations, monitoring livestock on farms with vast acreage, tracking and mapping fires to help with emergency response, weather forecasting, humanitarian and disaster relief and more.

“The No. 1 application for drones is agriculture, and the No. 1 employer for Washington County is agriculture,” said Hamed. “Our leading industry is agriculture, and drones can do so much for agriculture, and we’re excited about that.”

Mindy McCroskey, an agriculture teacher at Abingdon High School, recently received her license to fly a drone after completing the classes at the community college, followed by passing a written test.

Locations for test centers for the Federal Aviation Administration Part 107 UAS examinations

See **DRONES**, Page B2

At Abingdon High, the show must go on



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ABINGDON, Va. — Hopefully, by the time you read this, Miss Lynch won’t be on crutches for the second weekend’s worth of “Grease” performances at Abingdon High School.

Or maybe she will. And, hey — maybe that’s OK, at least onstage.

Miss Lynch, the teacher role in the musical “Grease,” is not required to stand on crutches.

But accidents happen.



Joe Tennis

And just two days before this high school show premiered with a dress rehearsal on Feb. 28, the actress portraying Miss Lynch took a fall.

That actress, I now reveal, is my 17-year-old daughter.

She did not break her leg; she sprained her ankle. But, ever since, I have heard a lot of “break a leg” comments about actors going on stages.

Undaunted, my daughter got on stage, on crutches, like a tried-and-true trooper. And I was ever so proud to see her, as Miss Lynch, command the greaseball ‘50s kids with a forceful tone.

You know what? It all worked.

In fact, those crutches even seemed natural.

Maybe, I thought, Miss Lynch should have been cast in a cast and as an accident-prone instructor in charge of those hipsters of the hand jive.

“That’s always the big fear: There’s always the chance that a principal is going to get sick or have a sprained ankle,” said 17-year-old Brice Crum, who plays Danny in the show.

“We kind of didn’t know what to think,” Crum added. “We didn’t know if she could walk.”

Turns out, she could — with crutches.

Turns out, too, for Crum, being cast as the lead in this high school musical was a longtime dream.



The cast of “Grease” poses at Abingdon High School. For more photos from Abingdon’s production, see page B3.

JOE TENNIS/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

“There’s a lot of pressure to make sure you’re on top of your lines,” Crum said. “You’ve got to set an example, but it’s definitely a lot of fun.”

You just have to work together, even if accidents do happen.

Just ask the chorus teacher, Alissa King, who’s in charge of the remaining “Grease”

productions at Abingdon High School on March 8 (7 p.m.) and March 9 (2 and 7 p.m.).

“Their teamwork has built them as students and as individuals,” said King, 26. “And this is something that’s bigger than they are. And it’s going to apply to anything they do in life, as far as working as a team.”

GROW YOUR OWN GARDEN

Community garden hopes to jump-start season with kickoff

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Steve Lindeman loves to grow vegetables — especially hot peppers. When the Hayter's Gap resident noticed the pepper plants were not getting enough sunlight in his home gardens last year, he rented garden space in Abingdon to grow nine different varieties of peppers, all of which he uses for cooking and making hot sauces and salsa.

Lindeman is among several gardeners who participate each year in the grow-your-own community garden at Fairview Historic Homestead on Hillman Highway in Abingdon.

The program was created four years ago by Sustain Abingdon, a committee comprised of town employees and citizens whose mission is to improve the quality of life for residents by offering environmentally sustainable solutions, principles and practices.

While the community garden has been beneficial to some local residents, organizers of the garden program are disappointed more people are not taking advantage of it.

It's fair to say the community garden program has not grown as fast as organizers had hoped.

"Once we get people to realize the program is there for them, we can provide a great thing," said Missy Kalb, organizer of this year's community garden.

To draw more attention to the program, Sustain Abingdon is partnering with Appalachian Sustainable Development to host a garden kickoff day from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, March 23. The event will be held at Fairview Historic Homestead, where visitors can learn about the garden program and receive tips on how to grow their own food.

The free event will feature informational handouts, activities, free raffles and giveaways. Food vendors will be on-site.

Sixteen organizations will be represented at the event, with five of them presenting informational talks on various garden topics.

"The informational talks will help people get started with their gardens," said Kalb. "That was us three years ago when my family and I moved here from Maryland. We had to get used to the climate in Southwest Virginia. We weren't sure what would grow best or when to start seeds."

Residents of Washington County and Bristol, Virginia, can lease from 20 available garden plots, each measuring 20 by 20 feet. Rent for each plot is \$25 for the spring and summer growing season. Participants can begin planting the gardens as early as April 1.

The Old Glade Antique Tractor Association prepares the garden spaces for planting, after which gardeners are responsible for tilling and weeding their own gardens. An elaborate rain water collection system on-site provides water access for the gardeners.

"We want more people to learn about the Abingdon garden and to take advantage of the opportunity to grow their own gardens," said Kalb. "It's a great resource to teach people how to grow their own food and to give them more control over their own health. It's especially important to get families involved because childhood obesity is prevalent."

The gardening boom is a growing trend throughout the nation, as well as in small rural communities. An increasing number of people are dedicating their free time to growing their own food, primarily because they want to have more control over where



PHOTOS BY CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

The grow-your-own community garden located at Fairview Historic Homestead lets local residents maintain their own gardens on rented plots. Workshops for getting started will be held at the garden kickoff day on Saturday, March 23.



their food comes from.

Kalb said the garden program is also a good way for people to nurture relationships and to work together for a common goal.

"It's our goal to develop a community of gardeners who can help and support each other — swap seeds, borrow tillers and exchange advice."

Businesses and organizations featured at the event include Abingdon Farmers Market, Appalachian Sustainable Development, Barefoot Hippie Homestead, Fairview Historic Homestead, Highlands Beekeepers Association, Indoor Farms Greenhouses, Old Glade Antique Tractor Association, Permaculture Community Garden (Abingdon Gardens), Petals & Lace, Upper Tennessee River Roundtable, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Highlands Community College Horticulture Program, Washington County Library Seed Savers, Washington County Master Gardeners and Wolf Farm Natural Elements.

During the kickoff event, gardeners can learn what they can do to deter wildlife, such as birds, raccoons and rabbits.

Kalb will partner with a local licensed trapper this year to help manage the control of primarily groundhogs, a common nuisance for gardeners who have

participated in the program.

For more information about the garden kickoff day or how to rent a garden space, call 276-628-3167.

In the event of inclement weather, call 276-492-2144 to confirm the rain date as March 30.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

Kickoff Workshops

- » **11:30-11:55 a.m.:** Anita Manuel, Permaculture Community Garden, will speak on different types of gardening and strategies for getting started.
- » **12-12:25 p.m.:** Chelsea Goulding, agriculture education program manager for Appalachian Sustainable Development, will talk about their Grow Your Own program.
- » **12:30-12:55 p.m.:** Heather Carlsen, a local homesteader, will discuss composting.
- » **1-1:25 p.m.:** Dr. David Kalb of Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will talk about animal pest management.
- » **1:30-1:55 p.m.:** The Highlands Beekeepers Association will discuss beekeeping.

Herb dryer brings new opportunities for farmers



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Katie Commender could hardly contain her enthusiasm.

At lunchtime on Thursday, we chatted about a gift given to the Abingdon-based Appalachian Sustainable Development — a dryer that will be placed at the Appalachian



Joe Tennis

Harvest Herb Hub in Duffield, Virginia, and used by forest farmers to dry herbs like black cohosh, goldenseal and ginseng.

"It significantly increases drying capacity so that farmers can not only dry more herbs, but they can dry different types of herbs," Commender said.

"It helps us expand not only the number of farmers we impact, but it helps us expand into different types of crops that we can work with farmers on."

Is this a big deal? You better believe it.

This new-to-you dryer spans 40 by 10 feet: a huge increase from the 3-by-3-foot dryer now in operation at Duffield — about an hour's drive from Abingdon in nearby Scott County.

An hour, to some, may sound like a long way to go to dry herbs.

But for farmers, Commender says, that's an easy commute.

Why, some come three hours — or more — from Grayson County, Virginia, or Lewisburg, West Virginia, she said.

Reason: Getting your own dryer to complete these root-drying tasks would cost about \$15,000!

"We are really hoping to spread the



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Katie Commender, who works for Appalachian Sustainable Development, talked about the benefits of a dryer located in Duffield, Virginia, that will allow local farmers to dry their own herbs.

word to farmers about the opportunities available to them, and this new dryer certainly increases our capacity to help," said Commender.

"Our demand for forest botanicals and field-grown herbs now outweighs our available supply."

As Commender sees it, the Appalachian Harvest Herb Hub in Duffield reduces barriers to forest farming, an

agroforestry practice uniquely suited to the Appalachian Mountains.

Hooking up this new dryer and finding solutions for farmers is all in a day's work for Commender, who came to work for ASD in 2012 as a Sustainable Forestry AmeriCorps VISTA; she was recently promoted to agroforestry program director in September 2018.

Along this journey, Commender moved from her home state of Pennsylvania to live in Abingdon for three years before relocating to Blacksburg, Virginia, to pursue a graduate degree.

Returning to the Tri-Cities, she came back to work in Washington County at Abingdon for ASD but now lives in nearby Sullivan County, Tennessee.

"At 28 years old, I feel incredibly blessed to have the opportunity to serve as ASD's agroforestry program director," Commender said. "I wake up every day with one of the most rewarding opportunities before me — helping farmers achieve their dreams, whether it's diversifying their crops to mitigate risk, implementing new agroforestry practices to increase yield and conserve natural resources, or accessing new premium-priced markets to improve livelihoods."



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Stephanie Howard (left) poses with her husband and children at the Play Date entrance at the Highlands Shopping Center in Abingdon. Howard's business won second place among start-up businesses, and she was honored for having the best financial pitch of all participants in the Washington County Business Challenge. Her \$3,000 in prize money will go toward expanding services offered at the play area.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Max and Owen enjoy the Ball Dumper in the foam ball arena inside Play Date.

Over the next few weeks, the Washington County News will feature a series of stories on the winners of the 2019 Washington County Business Challenge. The fourth in the series is on Play Date, which won second place in the Start Up Business Awards.

All work. All play.

Play Date imagines fun and educational expansion with awards from Washington County Business Challenge

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — With as many as 100 five-star, handwritten reviews and nearly 3,000 followers on Facebook, Abingdon's newest indoor play and party venue is becoming more than child's play.

Stephanie Howard said her business, Play Date, located in the Highlands Shopping Center, is creating a positive impact in the community for both kids and adults.

After being in business for nearly a year, Howard has won second place as a start-up business in the 2019 Washington County Business Challenge. She also received the highest score from judges for "pitching" a business idea during the competition.

The Business Challenge is an annual business plan competition designed to attract entrepreneurs to start and expand business in the county.

Both awards will offer her a total of \$3,000 to use toward expansion projects.

"I'm finding my business is answering a need I actually didn't foresee when I opened in 2018," Howard said.

"There's a need for parents, grandparents and other caregivers to relax and just have someone to talk to while their children play in a safe and fun environment. We are delighted to be offering that feature."

In addition to providing an indoor, clean space for kids ages 10 or younger to play, socialize and party, Play Date allows free admission to caregivers and noncrawling babies.

"It's really such a compliment to be the place [that] caregivers trust enough to bring their children to play and to feel comfortable enough to enjoy some coffee and good conversation while they're here," said the business owner.

"The word is getting out. People really love Play Date and what we have to offer. It's very heart-warming, and it makes me feel really good about our hard work."

"Our sales have increased by 50% since October 2018. I've also been able to hire two part-time employees."

Booked months in advance, private parties have taken off, providing Howard the stable revenue needed to make her small business successful.

"I love being open during the week for kids to come and play, but my prices are so affordable, I can't survive on that. Parties are what keep us afloat."

"We usually host five parties each weekend. Most private party spots are booked solid for the next two months. We offer private party packages where we do everything — we decorate and provide the pizzas, chips and drinks. All you have to do is bring the cake," she said.

"A lot of caregivers are grandparents and even great-grandparents. We want to take the stress off of them. All they have to do is show up with the birthday child and a smile, and we've got the rest covered."

Before opening her business, the mother often traveled with her children to Asheville, North Carolina, and Gray, Tennessee, to indoor playgrounds for one of their birthday parties or to play for the day.

"Being a mother of three children younger than 10, I know and understand the need for a clean, safe, affordable and fun space for our younger kids to exercise and socialize," Howard said.

Howard said her rapid success as a businesswoman has prompted her to think about growing her small business. Currently, the facility offers opportunities for physical play, improving sensory

skills and growth in socialization. Howard entered the Business Challenge with hopes of expanding her business with more learning opportunities for children.

First, she envisions adding an outdoor patio where parents and caregivers can soak up the sun while their children play at water and sand tables.

Her second idea is to convert a 150-square-foot unused space in Play Date into a Play Market.

"With our Play Market concept, we will teach children about money management, counting, customer service and, most of all, confidence for their young entrepreneurial minds," she said.

Howard said the Business Challenge has given her greater confidence to pursue her business goals.

"I can't say enough about the positive impact of the Business Challenge. I'm a college graduate, and I've taken business courses. I thought I knew how to write a business plan when I opened my business. Now, I have a true business plan."

"The Business Challenge makes you look at things realistically — where I am, what I can do differently. It gave me a solid foundation I thought I already had."

Play Date, located on Charwood Drive, has extended hours from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday through Thursday, starting May 7 as a summer trial. She hopes to continue the extended hours depending on popularity. The business opens 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

Private parties are reserved for Friday and Saturday after 3 p.m. with two spots available on Sunday.

Follow Play Date on Facebook for prices and special events.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

Jane Seymour talks TV, Johnny Cash and fan questions

WANDERING AROUND WASHINGTON

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Johnny Cash showed up on the set of "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman."

And for actress Jane Seymour, the star of the 1990s' "Dr. Quinn" series, that was "a life-changing experience," Seymour said during a recent telephone interview.

Seymour has starred in movies like "Live and Let Die," "Somewhere in Time," "Wedding Crashers" and "East of Eden."

On "Dr. Quinn," she worked more than once with Cash and his wife, June Carter, who was, incidentally, born just one county away from Washington County

— in Scott County, Virginia, at Maces Spring.

Johnny and June showed up on a few episodes of "Dr. Quinn," Seymour's series from 1993 to 1998.

"We became lifelong friends," Seymour said. "It was just an amazing privilege."

Seymour, 68, and her then-husband, James Keach, became such great friends with the singers that they would stay at the Cash couple's homes in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and Jamaica.

Over time, too, Seymour said, Johnny started talking about how he wanted his life story told.

"Johnny turned to us and said, 'Someone is going to make the story of my life,'" Seymour remembered. "He said, 'I don't really have anyone that I can trust.'"

Yet, for about a decade, Johnny and June would trust James and Jane, giving them exclusive interviews that could form the basis for future projects. Those interviews became the launching point for a movie script, and "Walk the Line," a biopic of Johnny's life with June, finally premiered in 2005.

But, you may not know that from looking at the credits, where Keach is listed as co-producer.

James Keach's work is noted; Jane Seymour's is not.

The Keach-Seymour couple — now divorced — had actually sold the rights to making the movie in order to find a way for it to be produced, Seymour said.

But, Seymour added, "We had a chance to read the actual finished script to John-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jane Seymour, star of "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman," "Live and Let Die" and "East of Eden," will attend Barter Theatre's "An Evening with Jane Seymour" fundraiser, answering fan questions and giving autographs.

ny and June before they passed."

Both Johnny and June died in 2003.

Today, Seymour said she could write a book about her experiences with Johnny and June.

And writing a book is something that Seymour has certainly done. The actress has released about a dozen books in addition to starring in television shows and movies.

You can find out more — and up-close — when the actress arrives in Abingdon for "An Evening with Jane Seymour" on May 8 at the Barter Theatre (www.bartertheatre.com).

This is a fundraiser and includes a post-event reception at the Martha Washington Inn & Spa. Barter Theatre is offering special event tickets starting at \$150 and running up to \$600, which includes a private meet-and-greet with the actress, a photograph opportunity and an autographed DVD. You can reserve a spot by calling 276-628-2282.

Seymour says she's looking forward to coming back to Virginia, where she spent some time a few years ago when she made a 2012 movie in Roanoke called "Lake Effects."

Coming with her is Johnny Keach, her son, who was named for Johnny Cash.

At 23, Keach is a singer, and he said he wanted to come to Barter Theatre because he recalled the nearby Blue Ridge Mountains as a beautiful area, according to his mother.

Expect lots of laughter and life stories on May 8.

Seymour says she wants to stage a question-and-answer session.

"I think we're going to do a Q&A, which is my absolute favorite, because I've got so many stories and so many different parts of my life that I could talk forever," Seymour said. "And I think it's always great when whoever's the moderator gets to know what the people in that room would be interested in."