

**DIFFERENCE MAKER**  
**CHRIS COOK**  
**LINDA MILLER**  
**LINDA CARROLL**

Women of The Table put 'fresh' focus on food pantry

Chris Cook, Linda Miller and Linda Carroll make up the Women of The Table at St. George's Episcopal Church. The pantry provides about 5,000 pounds of food to about 100 families weekly.

# 2019 DIFFERENCE MAKERS MEET THIS YEAR'S HONOREES

The Free Lance—Star salutes these inspiring Difference Makers, who have made the Fredericksburg region a better place to live in admirable ways.

We are proud to shine the spotlight on these deserving local citizens and thank them for their immeasurable contributions to our community.

STORIES BEGIN ON NEXT PAGE



**BY ADELE UPHAM-CORNER**  
**PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA HARRIS**

**W**hen Fred Jermam arrived in Fredericksburg 11 years ago, he was homeless and without a home, a car and a job. Now, Jermam can't sit on a bench outside the park enjoying his favorite hobby: fishing. He has a home, a car and a job. He is a success story.

On a recent Thursday, it's a sunny day in Fredericksburg. Jermam is sitting at a table in the community center, talking about his life. He is smiling and looking at the camera. He is a success story.

He is a success story. He is a success story. He is a success story.

**DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019**  
**Local artists bring color to city's parks**

Juanita Shanks was angry at the lack of resources for her and her son. She now leads a local nonprofit that provides art supplies and helps them rebuild their lives in their hometown.



**DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019**  
**JUANITA SHANKS**

Thanks to her, region's former



**Fredericksburg**  
Observers have also reported Harris' work in artist Edward Hopper, which Harris found in art and rural scenes as well as depicting the lives of everyday Americans.

If you're unfamiliar with Harris' work, it's not too hard to find in and around Fredericksburg. "I've done a lot of the murals in town," said Harris. "On the side of Sammy's, the side of Spencer Levan Bowling, there's a mural."

You can also find his work at area restaurants, coffee shops and other local businesses throughout the city.

Not only does Harris create beautiful murals, he also paints brilliant, intense, jaw-dropping portraits, as well as Fredericksburg-unique landscapes in his downtown art studio.

Some of Harris' most intimate pieces may also cause one to pause, ponder and wonder. "I think when people look at my artwork, they think, 'He's pretty abstract,' but I'm really telling a story," said Harris.

Over the years, Harris has received many awards for his work, including artist of the year, best in show and first place honors. He's also helped countless local artists in their own personal pursuit of happiness.

Before becoming an artist and a teacher, Harris worked in the print department of a newspaper in Philadelphia.

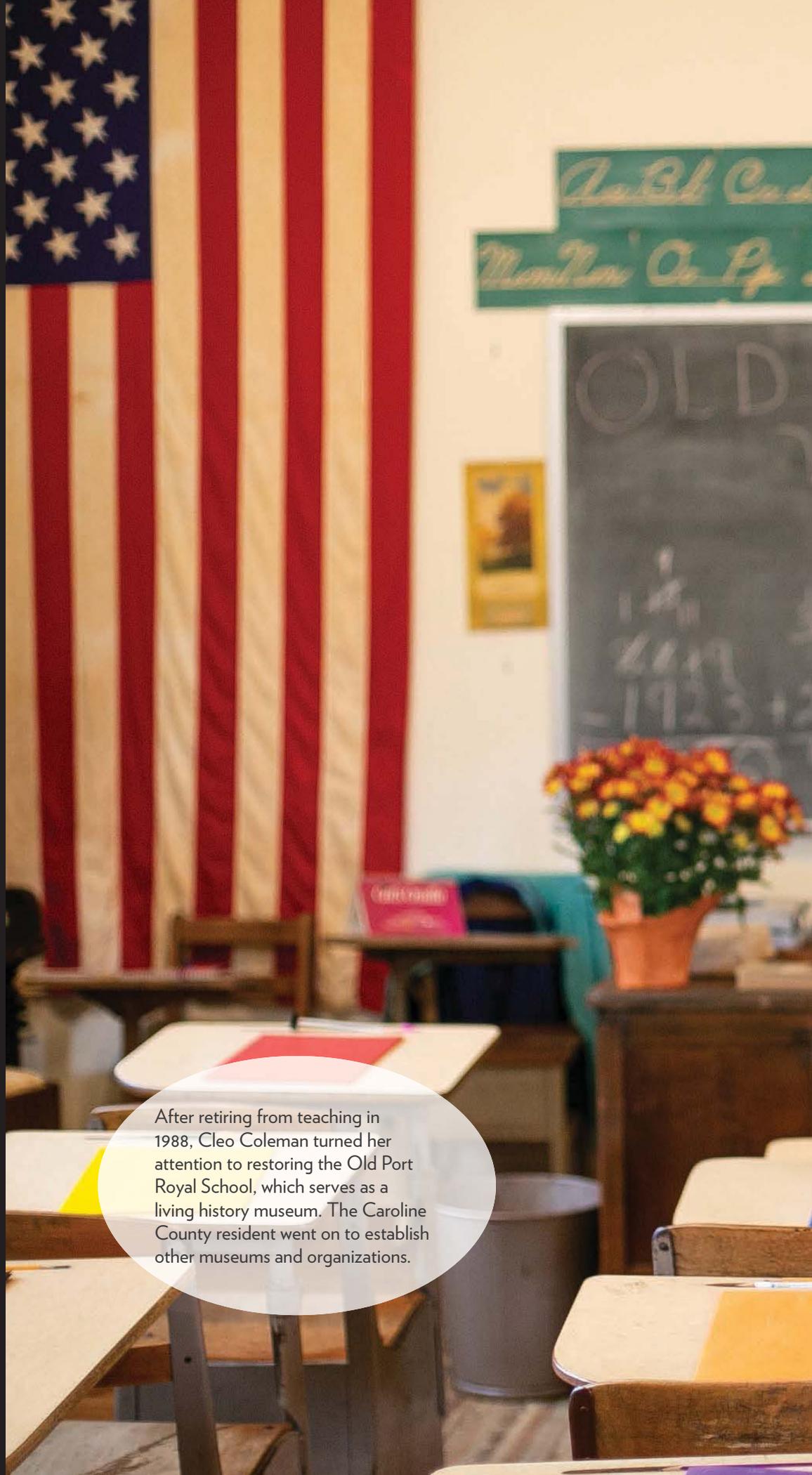
"When I worked there, it was exactly the same thing as art. It was all problem solving," said Harris.

"The thing that most people don't get about artists, painters, mural workers, painters—

# DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019 CLEO COLEMAN

Retired  
teacher is an  
ambassador  
for history  
in Port Royal  
and beyond

After retiring from teaching in 1988, Cleo Coleman turned her attention to restoring the Old Port Royal School, which serves as a living history museum. The Caroline County resident went on to establish other museums and organizations.





BY CATHY JETT  
PHOTO BY MIKE MORONES

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

Cleopatra Kay Coleman said the first thing she did after retiring as a teacher in 1988 was to look for a new endeavor.

She had moved back to Caroline County, where she had grown up, and spotted the old one-room schoolhouse in Port Royal. It had been one of 22 one-room schools for African American students in Caroline until it closed in 1959. And it was still standing, unlike the school she'd attended on land that is now part of Fort A.P. Hill.

"When I saw that schoolhouse, I remembered it because my cousins had attended it. I thought, 'Aha, here is my first retirement project.'"

Coleman, who has a passion for history, decided to use the building for a living history program where fourth-graders could experience what a typical day was like for African American students before segregation. Union Bank & Trust, now Atlantic Union Bank, owned the schoolhouse and was using it for storage. She approached Walton Mahon, who was the bank's president, with her idea.

"Walton was very open and said yes," she said. "He was nearing retirement and [incoming president] Billy Beale, along with the board of trustees, were more than generous, not only with that project, but every project I undertook."

That one-room school house, now the Old Port Royal School, was just the first of several museums and organizations that she would go on to establish in Port Royal and Spotsylvania County. She co-founded Historic Port Royal Inc., a nonprofit historical society for the old Colonial port town. It operates the Port Royal Museum of American History, the Port Royal Museum of Medicine and the Port Royal Portrait Gallery & Museum. She also wrote a booklet on the African American Cemetery in Caroline.

Coleman's other efforts include helping to found and open the John J. Wright Educational

Center and Museum in Spotsylvania County, and she worked with the county, state and National Park Service to create Spotsylvania's African American Heritage Trail. She's also known for her portrayal of Harriet Tubman, the Maryland slave who followed the North Star at night to freedom in Pennsylvania, and then went on to rescue about 70 slaves, including family and friends.

Earlier this year, Port Royal honored Coleman for being an energetic ambassador for its history, and she was celebrated for her efforts by the Spotsylvania Sunday School Union and by the Spotsylvania branch of the NAACP, which declared her its Citizen of the Year. Now, The Free Lance—Star has selected her as one of this year's Difference Makers.

"I was a facilitator, but cer-

tainly I could not have done any of it alone," Coleman said.

Her husband, the late Robert Coleman, for example, helped her organize the preservation of the Old Port Royal School in 1992, and others saw what she was trying to do and pitched in, she said.

"If you know what you want to do and are able to present your idea succinctly, then like-minded folk will join the fray," said Coleman.

After Union Bank & Trust let her lease the old school building for \$1 per year, Coleman interviewed Hortense Brown Rich to develop her living history program. Rich, who was 88 at the time, had been the school's sole teacher from the date of its construction until it closed in 1959. She taught all subjects for first through seventh grades.

Coleman's next big project was the Port Royal Museum of American History. She had a friend who had a "magnificent collection" that he might be willing to part with, and learned that Union Bank & Trust was planning to close its branch in Port Royal. She went to see Beale, who knew right away that she wanted the building, because it is next door to the one-room school.

"God bless Union Bank & Trust," she said.

Mrs. Ned Stehl donated Dr. Rogers Harris' office for the Port Royal Museum of Medicine, which opened in 2015 and displays medical implements donated by physicians and other collections related to the town's history. The Port Royal Portrait Gallery & Museum is located in the Town Hall and has 25 portraits of U.S. leaders with ties to Caroline. They include John Penn, the only Caroline County-born signer of the Declaration of Independence; and William Clark, who was a partner in the Lewis and Clark western expedition of 1803.

When she moved back to Port Royal, some people told her that Port Royal was "a potential Williamsburg waiting to be restored," Coleman said. "The town has a bit going on for it now." ❖



**CLEO COLEMAN**

**Hometown:**

Caroline County

**Family:** Husband Robert E.

Coleman, and one son, Michael Todd Coleman, have died. She has another son, Jonathan Todd Coleman; a daughter, Sylvia Kay Coleman; and two grandchildren.

**Occupation:**

Retired teacher

**Who is your role model?**

Harriet Tubman.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?**

She portrays Tubman as an old woman for groups.

**What are your favorite books?**

The copy of "Little Women" by Louisa May Alcott she received as a child one Christmas. It was her favorite gift of all time.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?**

Mary Jane McLeod Bethune, the daughter of former slaves who became an American educator, stateswoman, philanthropist, humanitarian and civil rights activist. She had an inner light that allowed her to bloom in a darkened corner.



...ves in Fredericksburg)  
...one grandchild  
...rker for Spotsylvania County

Teresa. My favorite Mother Teresa  
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a historical or fictional charac-  
y, theologian and founder of the  
Do all the good you can, by all the  
you can at all the times you can, to  
ever you can."

# DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019 DR. JOHN COKER

Pancakes,  
scarecrows  
and turkey  
trots: He's  
focused on  
family fun

A photograph showing a man's hands resting on a dark wooden surface. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a watch on his left wrist, and a gold ring on his left hand. In the background, there is a bronze sculpture of a turkey standing on a horse, mounted on a wall. The scene is indoors, likely in a home or office, with warm lighting.

Retired orthodontist John Coker, who founded the Rappahannock Rotary in 1985, has started several community events over the years. His aim has been to help make the Fredericksburg region a vibrant, family-friendly community.

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER  
PHOTO BY PETER CIHELKA

At 3 a.m. one morning in early October, Dr. John Coker was on top of a ladder in downtown Fredericksburg, unrolling flags.

He and Linda, his wife of 46 years, had just returned from a trip to Portugal, and he had been disappointed to see that wind had furled the new “Scarecrow Fest” flags that had been hung downtown.

The Rappahannock Rotary Club, which Coker founded in 1985, puts on downtown’s annual Scarecrow Fest—now in its fifth year—along with Fredericksburg Main Street and the Fredericksburg Police Department, and Coker wanted the new flags to look sharp.

So, still jet-lagged from his trip and awake early, he grabbed a ladder and headed downtown to fix them.

“It got to be about 4, 5 a.m. and a young lady was out jogging,” Coker said. “She stopped and said, ‘Thank you for your civic-ness.’ That really humbled me.”

Coker has been active in making Fredericksburg a better community for families since he moved to the area in 1984 to establish his orthodontics practice.

“John has adopted Rotary’s ‘Service Above Self’ as his life’s motto,” Linda Coker said. “He has tried to serve his community in every aspect of his life: children, community, church, profession and [by being] the best family man I know.”

Growing up in Ohio, Coker’s father was a Rotarian, so the model of service to the community was always before him. In Fredericksburg, he joined the existing club but found its evening meeting time conflicted with his work hours and family life.

So he gathered the necessary number of charter members to form a new Rotary club that would meet in the mornings.

“We now have approximately 125 members—we’re the largest club in our district,” Coker said.

In addition to the Rotary Club's service in the areas of promoting peace, fighting disease, providing clean water, helping mothers and children, supporting education and growing local economies, Coker has worked to establish "family events that are meaningful for the community" in Fredericksburg.

Among them are the annual Community Pancake Day, held the morning of the downtown Christmas Parade and the Scarecrow Fest, which culminated this year with a Scarecrow Stroll for which Coker purchased a 9-foot scarecrow—"Linda will be mad," he joked—to pull on a wagon.

"Halloween is my favorite time of year," he said.

Coker is also active with the Rappahannock United Way and St. George's Episcopal Church and, with his orthodontics practice or his family, has been a sponsor of the Great Train Race, the Turkey Trot and many children's theater productions at Riverside Dinner Theater.

The Cokers' three children grew up in the area and Coker coached their basketball, baseball and soccer teams. Now he coaches his grandchildren—he and Linda have four and one more on the way.

Coker said his children let him know about the new baby by sending him a new license plate.

His grandchildren call him "Chief"—a nod to his Native American heritage—and his license plate says "Chief4" for the four grandchildren.

"One day this license plate comes in the mail that says 'Chief5' and that's how they told us," he said with a laugh.

On a recent October morning, Coker was getting ready to read to his granddaughter's kindergarten class at Hugh Mercer Elementary.

He has a library of children's books from when he used to read to his children's classes,

and he'd picked out some of his favorite "getting ready for fall" stories for the class.

He'd also stopped at the dollar store and picked up some Halloween goodies to hand out to the children.

Later, he planned to have the grandchildren help him get the Halloween decorations out of the attic and work on decorating the house.

The Cokers have lived for the past 19 years in a house on lower Caroline Street that their son, Tug, helped build when he worked for contractor Tom Wack one summer.

Coker, who retired from his orthodontics practice six years ago, said the couple plan to have an elevator installed so they can stay in the house—and in Fredericksburg—for years to come.

"This is a vibrant community," he said. "We'll stay here." ♦

~~Becky Paul, co-manager of School Dressing Days, has worked with Faulconer for about a decade and said she is consistently smiling, cheerful and focused on the needs of others.~~

~~"You would never suspect the things that go on in her life," Paul said. "She's always upbeat, asking how you are doing. She's strong in her faith. It's remarkable."~~

~~Scott Hopkins, pastor of Peace United Methodist Church, has observed Faulconer since arriving at the church about 2½ years ago.~~

~~He said the two made an immediate connection and he's impressed by the way she works with people. She serves with a sincere interest in their well-being, treats everyone with kindness, and operates without ever looking over her shoulder to see~~



## DR. JOHN COKER

**Hometown:** Nelsonville, Ohio

**Family:** Wife Linda; son Tug and his wife, Kathryn, and their two kids, Bo and Quinn; daughter Lindsay and her husband, George III, and kids George IV and Susanna; and daughter Lorie and her husband, Bryan, who have a baby on the way.

**Occupation:** Retired orthodontist; offices were in Spotsylvania, Stafford and King George.

**Who is your role model?** Differing stages of my life, I had people that I respected and tried to emulate both professionally and personally—coaches, teachers, etc. However, through it all, my father, John H. Coker Sr., would be my role model for all that he did for our community, citizens and friends and family.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I love colleges and college campuses and have collected over 200 college T-shirts from the bookstores. They have to be purchased in person.

**What is your favorite book, TV show and movie?** "See you at the Top" by Zig Ziglar, "Dancing with the Stars," and "Bullitt" with Steve McQueen.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Jim Thorpe, an Oklahoma Native American and one of our country's greatest athletes.

**DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019**  
**DR. PETER FAHRNEY**

**Colonial  
Beach  
foundation  
leader 'has  
helped  
thousands'**





As president of the Colonial Beach Community Foundation, Dr. Peter Fahrney has had a hand in many of the town's recent revitalization projects.

BY ROB HEDELT  
PHOTO BY MIKE MORONES

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

Dr. Peter Fahrney didn't organize or take part in each and every one of the projects and efforts the Colonial Beach Community Foundation has been involved with over the last decade or so.

But as president for 11 years of the fundraising and organizing group created to help build a better Colonial Beach, he's been connected in one way or another to most of them.

Sometimes, as in the case of sending 164 children to summer camps over the years, he oversaw fundraising and the granting of money to help make it happen. Other times, it was about putting those with a need in touch with others who could get those needs met.

Whatever the connection, Fahrney was involved in one way or another with projects that added decorative banners downtown, installed an oyster reef in Monroe Bay, cleaned up town beaches, helped create the new Torrey Smith recreational park, controlled feral cats, cleaned a military memorial and beautified the riverfront.

Another list of foundation interactions would include support for other efforts in Colonial Beach, be it the Colonial Beach Playhouse, a community garden, a town choir, concerts and live shows in town and summer movies on the green.

The foundation also took over management of Colonial Beach's community center four years ago.

"I couldn't for a second take credit for all these efforts," said the man who worked as an emergency room doctor for 32 at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Md., after serving as a military physician in Vietnam. "Most times my part or the foundation's role was responding to requests for funding or helping to manage finances for entities that needed our help."

Like the way the foundation became the entity that holds the license and ownership of the town's new radio station, WWER.

Tom Savage, a town resident

and the foundation's treasurer, put it this way:

"Through his work and volunteer efforts, Fahrney has helped thousands in our town and the surrounding county of Westmoreland," he said. "He has helped to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars that have been returned to the community to enhance the quality of life here."

Savage added that even though Fahrney will step down from the presidency this year as part of an effort to expand leadership in the foundation, he expects the solution-oriented town resident to continue helping, even though he is more than 80 years old.

"It's a true testament to living a good life by helping others," added Savage.

Fahrney said he's enjoyed every minute he's spent with the foundation, and doesn't plan to quit being involved though he'll no longer be in the top seat.

"I love helping people," he said. "It's why I got into medicine. And I'm proud of the things we've been able to accomplish over the years. This is an amazing community and I am glad that the foundation has been able to play a part in making it even better."

The foundation, created in 2005, has a simple mission statement: "To improve the quality of life in and around Colonial Beach through collaboration and the powerful caring nature of our community."

Fahrney said it's typical for foundations such as Colonial Beach's to spend initial years getting organized and upping the level of fundraising. He believes the group is now entering a different period, when it needs to raise its public profile and further ramp up fundraising efforts.

"But in addition to dollars raised, much of what's been accomplished here in Colonial Beach has been done by the residents and volunteers who have

a wealth of talent and energy," said Fahrney. "You don't have to look too far to see several of the same names involved with many different projects."

One project that Fahrney was part of, separate from the town's Community Foundation, was the "rescuing" of a gallery space downtown just off the water.

It's the Artists Alliance Gallery, adjacent to Jarrett Thor Fine Arts. A collection of artists in or connected to Colonial Beach came together to save the gallery space when private owners were about to give it up.

Fahrney, who's a photographer with a fine eye, is one of the

principals in the alliance that stages exhibitions, shows the work of members and takes part in the art walks in town.

He started coming to Colonial Beach on holidays and weekends and says he thinks the town is really hitting its stride these days. It offers so many cultural and fun activities that he says there's always something interesting to do.

Fahrney said the foundation has roughly 100 members and it is always looking to add to its membership and funding.

Those interested in learning more can go online to [cbcommunityfoundation.org](http://cbcommunityfoundation.org). ❖



## DR. PETER FAHRNEY

**Hometown:** Frederick, Md.

**Family:** Not married, with three children who live in New Mexico and Montana

**Occupation:** Retired emergency medicine physician

**Who is your role model:** Dr. John Weigenstein, an emergency physician from Michigan, a man who along with Jim Mills, MD, from Alexandria, formed the basis for the specialty of emergency medicine. Both were gentlemen who were intelligent, dedicated, efficient and visionaries. I feel exceptionally proud to have worked with these two men in the early days of organizing emergency medicine, now an established specialty.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** That I was one of the guys who started to get emergency medicine organized in 1968 and 1969.

**What's your favorite book, movie or TV show?** No favorite. I enjoy them as they come to me.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Ben Franklin: intellect, inventor, statesman, politician, practical and a lover of the good life. He was a man at the crossroads of change without being over-inflated (even though he thought the turkey should be our national bird!).

# DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019 ERIN FAULCONER

Volunteer  
is dedicated  
to feeding  
and clothing  
those who  
are in need



BY PAMELA GOULD  
PHOTO BY MIKE MORONES

**E**rin Faulconer has a servant's heart that's spurred by her faith and driven by what she's seen.

She served as an eligibility worker for the Spotsylvania County Department of Social Services until her health forced her to quit nearly 20 years ago.

But neither her diagnosis of multiple sclerosis nor her responsibility to care for an adult daughter with a debilitating illness has slowed her efforts to help the needy in the community.

In fact, she considers herself blessed when she considers the situations she's observed.

When not caring for her 30-year-old daughter, who was diagnosed with Rett syndrome, Faulconer is on the go throughout the Fredericksburg area, seeking to meet the needs of others.

She was the first volunteer to operate the food pantry at Peace United Methodist Church in Spotsylvania and now oversees it, along with a team of about 10 who provide help each week.

Today, they serve an average of 15 families and 60 to 80 people per week, providing food and help with utilities, according to Stephen Kerr, who serves with Faulconer and nominated her for recognition.

"She's an extremely giving person," Kerr said. "She donates a tremendous amount of her time to make our community a better place."

He also noted that she co-chairs School Dressing Days, a program of the Interfaith Community Council of Fredericksburg, on which she has served for about 17 years.

School Dressing Days, which is a year-round effort, provides back-to-school basics including backpacks, school supplies and clothing for children throughout the Fredericksburg area who can't afford those things on their own.

During recent summer giveaways, it's estimated the program met the needs of about 1,100 youngsters.



Erin Faulconer (front, center), who manages the food pantry at Peace United Methodist Church in Spotsylvania, is surrounded by her fellow volunteers. She also dedicates time to School Dressing Days, a program that provides back-to-school basics.

Becky Paul, co-manager of School Dressing Days, has worked with Falconer for about a decade and said she is consistently smiling, cheerful and focused on the needs of others.

“You would never suspect the things that go on in her life,” Paul said. “She’s always upbeat, asking how you are doing. She’s strong in her faith. It’s remarkable.”

Scott Hopkins, pastor of Peace United Methodist Church, has observed Falconer since arriving at the church about 2½ years ago.

He said the two made an immediate connection and he’s impressed by the way she works with people. She serves with a sincere interest in their well-being, treats everyone with kindness, and operates without ever looking over her shoulder to see



if someone is watching, he said.

Plus, he said one of the most impressive things about how she works is that she “has a perfect balance of delegating in her organizations.”

“She trusts the process to get it done,” Hopkins said. “That is highly unusual in volunteerism.”

Falconer, 54, is uncomfortable with the spotlight and would prefer to simply stay focused on helping others and building relationships, which is her greatest joy.

She doesn’t think she’s doing anything others wouldn’t do, given the opportunity. She’s thankful for Rappahannock Adult Activities Inc., which provides a day program for her daughter and the personal care attendant who assists Sarah for a few hours, four days a week.

“If I did not have the day support program or the personal attendant, I would not be able to do what I do,” she said.

Falconer started at the food pantry as a result of a conversation with the church secretary. The needs were outpacing the secretary’s ability to do her regular job and respond, Falconer recalled, so she offered to help. The program then kept growing and now involves assistance from the Fredericksburg Area Food Bank and other organizations.

Falconer is willing to learn from others and freely give them credit.

The church initially handed out prefilled bags stuffed with groceries, but after seeing how The Table at St. George’s Episcopal Church in Fredericksburg operated, she made a change.

Today, people who visit Peace United Methodist are partnered with one of the church volunteers and get to walk through the pantry and select items for themselves.

“They can take food they know they and their kids will eat,” she said. “They have loved it because they feel like they’re at a grocery store.”

As an eligibility worker and in her current efforts, Falconer has observed situations that

~~his wife, Kathryn, and their two  
sday and her husband, George  
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have touched her heart.

That includes the families whose possessions all fit into the motel room where they lived, the children forced to share one toothbrush, and the little girl whose only shoes were bowling shoes given to her by a neighbor.

Meeting those needs is what gives her life purpose and why she believes she is doing so well despite her medical condition.

“I tend to feel that God has given me the strength every day to be His hands and feet to serve others,” she said.

“From what I see, I’m blessed that I’m here,” she added. “I have a roof over my head. I have the love of family and friends. There’s so many people who are so destitute or homeless. Me and my daughter have a place to live and food on our table.” ❖

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~~“I was a facilitator, but cer-~~



## ERIN FAULCONER

**Hometown:** Las Cruces, N.M. (Lives in Fredericksburg)

**Family:** Three adult children and one grandchild

**Occupation:** Former eligibility worker for Spotsylvania County Department of Social Services

**Who is your role model?** Mother Teresa. My favorite Mother Teresa quote is, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” That’s what I strive for.

**What is something about you that might come as a surprise to others?** I am a history buff.

**Favorite book:** Anything by Nicholas Sparks

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** John Wesley, theologian and founder of the Methodist movement, who said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

# DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019 BILL HARRIS

Local artist's  
paintings  
bring color  
to city's  
nooks and  
crannies

Bill Harris, local artist and teacher, poses at his studio at LibertyTown Arts Workshop. Harris' murals and other pieces of art can be found throughout downtown Fredericksburg.





BY JAMES SCOTT BARON  
PHOTO BY PETER CIHELKA

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

His paintings have been compared to the works of Norman Rockwell.

“He’s a much better artist than I am,” said Bill Harris of Fredericksburg.

Observers also have compared Harris’ work to artist Edward Hopper, who like Harris, favored urban and rural scenes, as well as depicting the lives of everyday Americans.

If you’re unfamiliar with Harris’ work, it’s not too hard to find in and around Fredericksburg.

“I’ve done a lot of the murals in town,” Harris said. “On the side of Sammy T’s, the side of Spencer Devon Brewing, there’s a bunch.”

You also can find his work at area restaurants, coffee shops and other nooks and crannies throughout the city.

Not only does Harris create beautiful murals, he also paints brilliant, intense, jaw-dropping portraits and Fredericksburg-unique landscapes in his downtown art studio.

Some of Harris’ more intimate pieces also may cause one to pause, ponder and wonder.

“I think when people look at my artwork, they think, ‘He’s pretty abnormal,’ but I’m really boringly normal,” Harris said.

Over the years, Harris has racked up myriad awards for his work, including artist of the year, best in show and first place honors. He’s also helped countless local artists in their own personal pursuits of happiness.

Before becoming an artist and a teacher, Harris worked in the paint department of a hardware store in Philadelphia.

“When I worked there, it was exactly the same thing as art, it was all problem solving,” Harris said.

“The thing that most people don’t get about artists, potters, metal workers, painters—there’s a lot of problem solving,” he continued. “There’s a problem that comes up, I have to figure out how to do this. Same with art, I have to figure out how to make this composition work.”

Harris, who has been putting

**HARRIS** from p. 15

oil to canvas since leaving the hardware business, today makes 100 percent of his income by either painting or by teaching art. As a teacher, he's paved the way for hundreds of aspiring artists in the area.

"I have about 70 students now, mostly adults," he said.

Harris' studio is located at LibertyTown Arts Workshop at 916 Liberty St.

"I'm in the big purple building that the old Fredericksburg Hardware used years ago to keep their plumbing supplies," he said.

Harris teaches four classes per week there for people 16 and older.

During the classes, he discusses not only what to do, but what not to do when becoming an artist, including buying un-

als that some would-be artists will never use.

"People think oil paint is complicated and scary and really, it's not," Harris said.

"In fact," he continued, "As people dive into the hobby, they discover they are truly creating heirlooms that will last an eternity for their own families to enjoy."

Harris said students frequently paint their own family members, instantly creating family treasures, and those who return to art after leaving it for a number of years tell Harris they've forgotten how good it feels.

"When they've given it up for 30 years and they pick it back up, there's a wave of emotion," said Harris. "They've forgotten how it feels and often say they can't believe they haven't been doing this all along."

Harris said painting gives him a feeling that many artists experience as they spend countless hours at the easel.

"We have to do it; it makes us feel whole," Harris said. "We put a lot of time and effort into it, and it doesn't always make financial sense. I see a lot of marriages split up because of it. It's like going to the gym. You're not doing it because you like wasting money and time, you're doing it because artists have to do it."

Harris said Fredericksburg has numerous venues where artists can display and sell their work, including restaurants and coffee shops and at special events. For many years, Harris showed his work at those places, but when he became a teacher, he discovered a way to promote the work of his own students, while simultaneously helping

them launch their own careers as artists.

"I started plugging my students in with those places," said Harris. "This year, we've done six shows at different restaurants like Sammy T's, Sunken Well, Red Dragon, Hyperion and the downtown library."

Harris considers himself a go-between for artists and the public events that will feature their work.

"What I'm able to do is be a conduit for their artwork to all these venues that will show their work," said Harris.

"Restaurant owners want good, quality artwork to hang in their restaurants and they come to me to get artwork," said Harris. "I have the students that want to make and show their art in hopes to sell it. I have the connections and I have the artists looking to fill that void, so that's probably the thing that I do right now that is the most useful to the city."

Harris said there is a vibrant community of artists locally who have developed a fellowship among themselves, spending time together at lunches and other social events beyond the art studio. But it's art that's at the heart of it, the real reason they came together in the first place.

Harris helps bring it all together for the public to truly enjoy at the annual Art Attack festival.

In 2012, Harris and fellow artist Gabriel Pons created the art project as an open-air, community event held on the sidewalks of Caroline and William streets.

The project allows the community a chance to celebrate local artists, while having opportunities to purchase beautiful, unique and original works of art.

It's also a time to simply gaze at works that are destined to become a lucky owner's priceless family heirloom, hopefully passed down for countless generations.

"I hope someday, when people think of Fredericksburg, they think, what an amazing art community we have," said Harris. ♦

**BILL HARRIS**

**Hometown:** Philadelphia

**Family:** Three sons, ages 20, 22 and 24

**Occupation:** Artist, art teacher

**Who is your role model?** I don't know if I've really had one specific role model. I've learned things here and there from different people and my influence has been from a variety of people. I'm fortunate that I've had a good group of friends I've known since elementary school, all doctors, lawyers, teachers, and law enforcement, not artists. A good group of close friends helps keep me grounded. They have no trouble telling me my art is awful.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I'm pretty boring, honestly. I go home, I watch baseball, I like being alone, I'm not a big partier. I don't live some kind of

wild artist lifestyle. I used to be a stay at home parent, I coached baseball. I think I was really normal.

**What's your favorite book, movie, or television show?** The thing that makes me real good at painting makes it almost impossible for me to read. Also, I'm not a very good reader, my eyes just scan all over the place. Reading is difficult for me; I've never finished a book. There's some poetry that I can read. I read a lot of Charles Bukowski's poems. I also love documentaries and am always amazed at something that sounds boring is really good. I recently watched a documentary on corn and it was fascinating.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Ernest Hemingway, Johnny Cash, John Wayne, or go out and get into a bar fight with Robert Mitchum.

# DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019 FRED JERMAN

From  
homeless to  
empowering  
others, man  
gives back to  
community



Fred Jerman worked three jobs to put himself through school and now works as a paraprofessional at Hugh Mercer Elementary School. As a one-to-one paraprofessional, he learned Braille to help his charge, a 6-year-old blind student.



BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER  
PHOTO BY SUZANNE CARR ROSSI

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

When Fred Jerman arrived in Fredericksburg 31 years ago, he was homeless and addicted to heroin, cocaine and alcohol.

Now, Jerman can't sit on a bench outside Hyperion enjoying his favorite Monkeylicious frozen beverage without someone passing by stopping to say hello.

On a recent Thursday, Sandra Gillenwater, supervisor of instruction at Fredericksburg City Public Schools and former assistant principal at Hugh Mercer Elementary, where Jerman has worked as a one-to-one paraprofessional for the past four years drove up. She rolled down her window to yell greetings.

"I love Mr. Jerman," Gillenwater shouted as she drove away.

Jerman, now 67, chuckled.

"God's grace and mercy put me here [in Fredericksburg]," he said. "God puts you where He wants you."

In the three decades he's lived here, Jerman has worked hard to better himself and give back to the community, empowering countless children and young adults through his work, both paid and pro bono, at dozens of area organizations.

These include Serenity Home, the rehab facility that helped Jerman get sober and where he coached others as a substance abuse counselor; Rappahannock Big Brothers Big Sisters; Fredericksburg Area HIV/AIDS Support Services; Dominion Youth Services; Gladys Todd Academy; Sunshine Ballpark; Mary Washington Hospital; Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank; and Mary Washington Hospital.

"It's been a charmed life in recovery," Jerman said. "And I wanted to give back. My goal every day is to be a better man than I was yesterday. I love to lay down my head on my pillow every night knowing I've done my best."

Jerman was born and raised in Richmond. He said his father was an alcoholic.

"He'd hit my mom, he'd hit

## JERMAN from p. 17

the bottle and he'd hit me," Jerman said. "You never knew in what order."

His older sisters escaped into education, he said, and his younger brother escaped into ministry. He escaped into drugs and alcohol.

"The things I've done to support my habit, I'm ashamed of," he said.

Jerman isn't sure exactly how or why he ended up in Fredericksburg, but in 1988, he did. With support from Janice and the Rev. Lawrence Davies, who he met at Shiloh Baptist Church (Old Site), he found a place at Serenity Home and got started on the path to sobriety.

He'd attempted at least a dozen other times, but this time, he was successful. He credits the support of a positive peer group all equally focused on recovery.

"That's key," Jerman said. "People who'd stay on top of me. And letting go of negative people. To this day, I'm not around negative people."

Jerman got jobs at Country Cookin' and McDonald's. As he found his footing, he started thinking about going to college.

Someone told him he needed to talk to Bill Anderson, presi-

dent of what was then Mary Washington College.

So Jerman went into Anderson's office and asked to speak to "Bill."

"The lady in the office said, 'We call him Dr. Anderson here,' and he's too busy," Jerman recalled.

He kept coming, walking across to the college after shifts at Country Cookin' and asking to see Anderson because he wanted to go to Mary Washington.

"I overheard [Anderson's secretary] one time saying, 'He'll go here when hell freezes over,'" Jerman said with a laugh. "Well, when I graduated—she loved me by that point—I went to her and said, 'Hell has frozen over.'"

Jerman was 40 when he started taking classes at the college and he paid his way by working at Country Cookin', McDonald's and Paul's Bakery.

"I was poor, black and a recovering addict," he said. "My classmates were taking winter break to go on vacation and I was trying to pick up another shift."

Eventually, Jerman graduated with a degree in psychology.

"I got my diploma and I went to see my mother in her

SEE JERMAN, 47



### FRED JERMAN

**Hometown:** Fredericksburg (previously from Richmond)

**Family:** Single (two sisters; one brother, deceased)

**Occupation:** Paraprofessional at Hugh Mercer Elementary

**Who is your role model?** My role model is my sister.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a**

**surprise to others?**

Others would be surprised how modest I am!

**What's your favorite book?**

The Bible.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?**

Moses. I would have liked to have stood where Moses stood!

## **JERMAN** from p. 46

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retirement home,” he said. “It was the first time I put tears of joy in her eyes instead of tears of sadness.”

Jerman put his psychology degree and his own past to work as a substance abuse counselor and clinical director at the Serenity Home.

His formal education in how drugs work on the brain combined with having lived the experience himself helps him forge a bond with those struggling with a substance use disorder.

He also worked as a nursing assistant in the cardiac unit at Mary Washington Hospital and became an HIV/AIDS case manager.

Jerman became friends with philanthropist Doris Buffett, who felt he could help her in her goal of improving the lives of at-risk youth in the area through education and positive opportunities.

“She’d say, ‘Fred, I write the check and you do the work,’ ” Jerman recalled.

He helped recruit students for the Gladys Todd Academy, the Buffett-funded program that provides economically disadvantaged high school students in Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County a chance to earn an associate’s degree while going to high school.

Jerman became involved in the Sunshine Ballpark and now serves on the board. He also acts as a mentor to James Monroe High School students in danger of failing or dropping out of school.

Four years ago, he took on a job as a one-to-one paraprofessional at Hugh Mercer Elementary School. Now, he works with a 6-year-old blind student, accompanying her throughout her day and “helping implement the things she needs to learn,” a job for which he’s taught himself Braille.

Jerman said his goal for all the kids he works with is for them to learn empowerment and empathy.

“When you learn empathy at an early age, it sticks,” he said. “I believe we’re good enough. Love is stronger than hate.” ❖

# DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019 MOZETT PETWAY

It is 'all  
about  
others' for  
local pastor,  
mentor and  
civic leader

Moe Petway learned to give back—and how to box—at the Boys & Girls Club in D.C. when he was a child. Today, the probation program manager and NAACP leader is the one serving as a mentor for local youth.





BY SCOTT SHENK  
PHOTO BY MIKE MORONES

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

**M**ozett Petway spent much of his childhood in Washington, D.C., in a household filled with eight brothers, three sisters and a single mother.

Petway's father died when he was just 8 years old, and that left a void.

But Petway found a way to fill it through the Boys & Girls Club.

"That was all we had in the summer," said Petway, known to his friends as Moe.

Petway learned many things through the club, including how to box.

It's also where he said he "learned to give back."

The 65-year-old Spotsylvania County resident took those lessons to heart, because giving back is something Petway specializes in—from working with youth through school programs and basketball and summer camps to serving as the president of the Spotsylvania NAACP and the pastor of a church.

"He's just always out there," said longtime friend Anita Roberson, who met Petway 30 years ago and was quickly "inspired by his motivation."

She said he has been such an unsung resource for the community for so many years, he deserves acknowledgement.

"He's so selfless," she said. "It's all about others."

Petway is the pastor at God's House of Blessings church in Spotsylvania and the probation program manager at the Rappahannock Regional Jail.

He served 21 years in the U.S. Army before retiring and moving to the Fredericksburg area in 1994. That's also when he started working in the community, based at the Bragg Hill Family Life Center. Through the center, Petway started wildly popular summer basketball camps.

Petway not only paid for equipment and referees, but would coach and referee games himself. He recalled one summer when he and others running the camps painted the courts in the Stafford County



## MOE PETWAY

**Hometown:** Washington, D.C.

**Family:** Wife, Avis; two daughters; five grandchildren

**Occupation:** Probation program manager, Rappahannock Regional Jail

**Who is your role model?** Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** My age. I will be 66 in March.

**What's your favorite movie?** "Gladiator"

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Barack Obama.

## PETWAY from p. 19

Olde Forge neighborhood so games could be played.

Reminders of the work he put in for the camp pop up from time to time.

"Every now and then I run into somebody and they talk about the summer league and how fun that was," Petway said.

The basketball camps ran for about a dozen years, but that was just one of the many programs Petway has been involved with locally.

In 2005, he established the annual Great Middle School Debate Program for middle-schoolers in Spotsylvania. The program has been adopted by the county school system.

And Petway continues to help run the Rites of Passage

program with fellow co-founder Richard Fortune, something they started more than a decade ago. The program allows black men to mentor black boys, many of whom lack a father figure. The adults teach the kids practical skills while also instilling confidence and character.

His community service isn't relegated to only the young. Petway also serves as president of the Spotsylvania branch of the NAACP.

Roberson serves with Petway with the NAACP, and she said calls come in at all hours from people seeking help through the group.

And she said Petway is atop the list.

"The name is out there," she said. "Moe Petway is out there to help people in need." ❖

**DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019**  
**JUANITA SHANKS**

**Thanks to  
her, region's  
former  
inmates and  
families have  
a 'failsafe'**





Juanita Shanks was angry at the lack of resources for her and her son during and after his incarceration. She now heads a local nonprofit that ministers to inmates and helps them rebuild their lives as they re-enter their community.

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON  
PHOTO BY MIKE MORONES

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

She never told anyone at work that her son was in prison.

“Nobody at my job knew about him being gone, or him being incarcerated, because I was ashamed,” said Juanita Shanks, president and chief executive officer of FailSafe—ERA.

In 2003, Shanks’ son was sentenced to three years in prison on drug charges.

“As I took that walk of shame, as I walked through that, I was becoming angry that there was nobody else out there like me who was going through what I was going through, and there was nobody to help me,” Shanks said.

Today, Shanks holds her head high as she leads FailSafe—ERA, a local nonprofit that helps the formerly incarcerated, who Shanks refers to as “returning citizens.”

Under Shanks’ leadership, FailSafe—ERA has evolved to help these men and women, as well as their families, by providing them the tools and resources necessary to help rebuild their lives and succeed as they transition back into their communities.

Shanks didn’t have those tools and resources during her son’s period of incarceration.

“I had to walk through the criminal justice system with my son, and as I did that, there were no resources out here for him, nor was there anything out here for me,” Shanks said. “There were no jobs; there wasn’t even a conversation about it.”

In 2004, while visiting her sister-in-law in Orlando, Fla., Shanks thumbed through a magazine she found at the home. Shanks was intrigued by a story about returning citizens making their complicated and frustrating transitions back into society. Although the article contained helpful information, Shanks was disappointed to learn the cited services were unique to that area.

“On my way to work one day, God told me to do something

**SHANKS** from p. 21

about it,” Shanks said.

Five years later, Shanks created FailSafe—ERA, initially setting up shop at the Bragg Hill Community Center in Fredericksburg.

Shanks created the nonprofit organization, whose ERA acronym means educate, reform and align, to work with all individuals and family members affected by incarceration.

The all-volunteer group works toward the goal in several ways.

Shanks said her organization’s spiritual ministry is the bedrock of FailSafe—ERA, which begins by taking God’s message into the walls of the regional jail

through the organization’s vibrant prison ministry program.

FailSafe—ERA volunteers regularly visit inmates to discuss biblical principles with them, offering guidance and direction to help inmates become spiritual leaders within their own families, thereby becoming solid, productive members of society, Shanks said.

When inmates are released, the ministry continues to provide ongoing support to the returning citizens and their families.

“We’re connecting with more and more churches in the area because we recognize everybody we come in contact with is not going to believe,” said Shanks. “We try to point them

in the right direction.”

Shanks said FailSafe—ERA also works with couples to strengthen marriages, which are often strained during an extended incarceration.

FailSafe—ERA also helps returning citizens find good-paying jobs through its Right Road Job Training and Placement Program, which is a partnership between the nonprofit and the American Traffic Safety Services Association, an international roadway safety trade association headquartered in Stafford.

During the five-day program, students participate in four days of social and emotional training, which includes behavior counseling, thought-processing, decision-making and goal-setting. The trade association then provides roadway flagger training for the students, which moves them one step closer to a job within the roadway safety industry.

FailSafe—ERA keeps close tabs on those who graduate, offering mentoring and coaching services to each student for one year following completion of the course.

“They still have challenges, but we are walking with them as they walk through these challenges,” said Shanks.

FailSafe—ERA also offers limited financial scholarships to those trying to get ahead in school or their own business, as well as a local Toastmasters program that helps enhance speaking, confidence and leadership skills.

The organization also offers programs to help young children cope with and manage the stress and complications associated with having one or both parents incarcerated, and also offers a special program for girls, ages 12 to 18, designed to curb female incarceration statistics. The course shows young women how to make better decisions in their lives by helping them set clearer, more definitive goals for themselves, Shanks said.

Shanks said she recently worked with a young formerly incarcerated woman who had found her way into an abusive relationship.

“We were able to help her to return to her hometown in Michigan through mentoring, counseling and keeping her on the right track,” said Shanks. “She could have easily slipped back into substance abuse had we not been able to work with her.”

To oversee all of these programs, Shanks said she typically works an average of 70 hours per week, with no salary.

Many of FailSafe—ERA’s volunteers do the same, all without pay.

“We have awesome volunteers on our team who share the same passion as I do, and the heart to help individuals who have been affected by incarceration,” said Shanks.

“My biggest fear is, I don’t want our volunteers to burn out,” she continued. “People are not being paid to do this. They’re doing it out of the goodness of their hearts and because they have the passion for it.”

Although FailSafe—ERA is funded solely by donations, fundraisers and dues collection, the cost of literature, meeting materials, travel and other expenses do add up. To help offset some of the expenses, Shanks is constantly searching for grants, donors and other subsidies to help the organization keep moving forward as the need for its services continues to grow.

Today, FailSafe—ERA operates out of the Rappahannock Goodwill Industries building in the Massaponax area of Spotsylvania County. The big dream shared by Shanks and her volunteers is to one day open the organization’s own Center of Hope, an all-inclusive facility in the region that will provide returning citizens transitional housing, local transportation, coaching and counseling services, training, employment and educational opportunities.

“We’re going to make our mark in Fredericksburg, and then we’re going to expand throughout the state of Virginia and throughout the country,” said Shanks. “This is my calling, I believe, so out of obedience, I’m walking in my obedience.” ❖

**JUANITA SHANKS**

**Hometown:** Toledo, Ohio

**Family:** Husband Jerome Shanks, grown children Eugene Melchior and Dr. Shekila Melchoir

**Occupation:** FailSafe—ERA president and CEO

**Who is your role model?** Juanita Smith, former federal government employee and president of Kingdom Building Equipping School, was my mentor and one of the first people that hired me in government. She gave me my first opportunity to get into a non-administrative government role and was also the catalyst in helping me pursue a degree in government.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I don’t like public speaking. I’m not a fan. I do it, and my role at FailSafe—ERA has put me in a position to do a lot of it, but really, I’m not a fan.

**What’s your favorite book, movie, or television show?** I don’t watch a lot of television, but when I do, it would be Hallmark romances, sitcoms and game shows. My favorite book is the Bible. That’s No. 1, and then any John Maxwell book, or any inspirational book that I can learn from.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** I would probably say several people, including Martin Luther King Jr., Shirley Chisholm and Michelle Obama. They were difference makers and they made history in the world, just because of their simplicity, something they stood for.

**DIFFERENCE MAKERS 2019**  
**CHRIS COOK**  
**LINDA MILLER**  
**LINDA CARTER**

**Women of  
The Table put  
'fresh' focus  
on food pantry**



Chris Cook, Linda Miller and Linda Carter—also known as 'LLC'—are the backbone of The Table at St. George's Episcopal Church. The pantry provides about 3,500 pounds of food for almost 200 families weekly.



BY CATHY DYSON  
PHOTO BY PETER CIHELKA

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

The women didn't set out to revolutionize food pantries. They just wanted to put some fresh fruits and vegetables on the table.

But in so doing, the trio of Linda Carter, Linda Miller and Chris Cook—known collectively as the “LLC”—has kicked to the curb some previously held notions about food distribution. The three offer “shoppers” both fresh produce and a choice of items, instead of handing them a prefilled box. They also invite people to come back as often as they want and to tell all their friends.

LLC are the backbone of The Table at St. George's Episcopal Church in downtown Fredericksburg, where food offerings run from apples to zucchini, and the program is set up more like a market than a traditional food pantry.

Word of mouth has spread to the point that, on an average week, each shopper takes home 25 pounds of food. About 15 pounds of that is whatever is in season—squash and cucumbers, melons and tomatoes, along with year-round staples such as bananas and potatoes.

“Weekly, this turns out to be about 3,500 pounds of food going to almost 200 families,” said Russell Carter (Linda Carter's husband) in nominating the trio for The Free Lance—Star's Difference Makers.

Elizabeth Borst, executive director of Virginia Community Food Connections, called the LLC “an amazing team of dedicated volunteers.”

“The faith, commitment and energy these women represent is truly a model for the community,” Borst said. “I am inspired by them and the work they do.”

### ‘A BETTER WAY’

Until seven years ago, St. George's held a traditional emergency food pantry in which those who needed help got enough bagged and boxed food to last two people two days. Linda Carter was involved and, as she talked with clients, learned

## **THE TABLE** from p. 23

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that those with diabetes or high blood pressure couldn't tolerate the high levels of salt and sugar in prepackaged foods.

"They were either throwing it out or trading with other people," she said. "We started saying, 'There's got to be a better way to do this.'"

At the time, she didn't know Miller or Cook, except as fellow church members. But the three found themselves drawn together in the pursuit of healthier options.

At first, one of them would camp out at the Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank, from which the team buys a lot of staples, and snatch up any fresh food that came through. That became too labor intensive, and the team explored avenues to buy produce so they'd have a consistent amount each week.

Borst connected LLC with Westmoreland County farmer Veronica Flores and her family. She sells The Table crates of items, at reduced rates, after she returns from Northern Virginia markets on Sundays.

Initially, the team stored cantaloupes and carrots in hallways or under pews until Cook started seeking grants to help the program.

One from the diocese provided produce in 2013; another was specifically for fruit. A \$30,000 grant from the Honeywell Foundation and administered



LINDA CARTER

**Hometown:** Summit, N.J.

**Family:** Married to Russ. Has a daughter, Megan; a son, Cordis; and two grandsons, Carter and Maeson.

**Occupation:** What do you do with an economics degree from a liberal arts college? I was lucky to become an assistant to a vice president of a major brokerage firm who dealt with commodities. At age 24, I was trading cocoa beans and helping to test a computerized trading model for doctoral candidates. Moved on to help set up a consulting firm doing performance measurement of investments for large labor, state and city organizations. That morphed into office manager for a fund group and I did performance measurement for 30 years until retirement in 2009. I continued to work with one of the funds until June.

**Who is your role model?**

I grew up in the 1960s with the civil rights and women's lib movements, so my role models are all those who fought and continue to fight to bring equality to all people.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** My "trading" days on Wall Street and that I did three varsity sports in college: field hockey, basketball and lacrosse. When Carter was younger, I used to help him practice his lacrosse catches.

**What's your favorite book, movie or TV show?** I'm more into Broadway, opera and classical music so I would have to say "Les Mis," "Cats" and "Man of La Mancha."

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Maya Angelou.

## THE TABLE from p. 42

through the Community Foundation of the Rappahannock River Region allowed them to offer both morning and evening distributions on Tuesdays.

Then, the team found a cooling unit, but needed permission



LINDA MILLER

**Hometown:** I claim Virginia!

As the daughter of a career Army officer, I have called a lot of places home, but I spent my teenage years in Northern Virginia. When I married a career Army officer, I continued the nomad adventure.

**Family:** Married to Robert for 47 years; two daughters and five grandchildren.

**Occupation:** Retired nonprofit management and resource development professional

**Who is your role model?** My father modeled a life of not only honesty and integrity, but a belief that you would succeed with hard work and determination. He passed that ethos on to me. Lately, I have been so inspired by young people who are taking the leadership on some of the most critical problems of our time.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I follow NASCAR. My daughter says that I am the "softer side" of NASCAR.

**What's your favorite book, movie or TV show?** I love anything by Aaron Sorkin: "The American President," "West Wing," "Newsroom." I'd love to see his adaptation of "To Kill A Mockingbird."

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Desmond Tutu. I admire how he is able to speak to the hard topics in a strong, gentle way.

from the City Council to put it in place. Cook remembers how nervous she was, making the presentation, twice, to officials.

Permission was granted to tuck the cooling unit into a nook on the George Street side of the church. Builders donated doors and a slate roof that matched nearby architecture.

"It actually turned out to be wonderful," Cook said.

### 'GOD WILL PROVIDE'

While the team scratched together donations and grants to pay bills, Cook dreamed of having a year's budget in reserve. Linda Miller thought it was doable.

"My belief is, 'If you're doing God's work, God will provide,'" she said.

The Table has a \$65,000 annual budget, with about \$5,000 coming from St. George's and the rest from individuals, community groups or grants. The church also provides the necessary space.

In addition to the Tuesday offerings, the LLC established The Table in the World and started taking fresh produce to elderly or low-income residents who



CHRIS COOK

**Hometown:** Catonsville, Md.

**Family:** One son and one daughter

**Occupation:** Retired

**Who is your role model?** My mother.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I know how to drive and operate a forklift.

**What's your favorite TV show?** "Jeopardy"

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Jo March from "Little Women."

couldn't make it to the church. Table in the World distributes to five city sites and provides fresh food for seniors through programs offered by Healthy Generations Area Agency on Aging.

Likewise, when federal workers were furloughed earlier this year, the trio quickly put together a pop-up market for those affected.

The Table has become a model for other pantries, Borst said.

"Getting healthy food to those who need it most is a huge need in the region," she said, "where 11.7 percent of residents are food insecure."

### 'NOT JUST THE FOOD'

All those who work at The Table are volunteers, including Carter, Miller and Cook, who each give about 30 hours a week to its operation.

"They have been consistent and reliable volunteers, working tirelessly to ensure that The Table shows up week in, week out for our shoppers," said the Rev. Areeta Bridgemohan, associate rector at St. George's. "The Table is a place of inclusivity, welcome, grace and abundance."

That's obvious from the assortment of people who unload trucks or line up crates of food. Some come from St. George's or nearby congregations, while others don't regularly darken a church door.

Helpers include homeless people and retired judges, grandmothers who thought they were finished with parenting but find themselves raising the next generation, along with teenagers or young adults who either want to put in community service hours or are ordered by the court to do so.

Each Tuesday, participants at The Table who so desire can pray with a church member or talk with a lawyer from Legal Aid Works about landlord disputes, hospital bills or custody matters. They might hear ways to cook kohlrabi (a German turnip) or learn about a free dental clinic in the area.

"It's just been amazing," Cook said. "We've come to the realization it's not just the food. We try to help the mind, body and the spirit." ❖

**DIFFERENCE MAKER 2019**

**ELIZABETH TAYLOR**

**Once an  
at-risk kid,  
she's now a  
passionate  
advocate**

Rappahannock Area YMCA Chief Operating Officer Elizabeth Taylor's signature YMCA campaign is Power Scholars, a summer program for at-risk kids that keeps them learning and having fun, so they gain skills during the break instead of losing them.



BY CATHY DYSON

PHOTO BY PETER CIHELKA

Every now and then, pieces of Elizabeth Taylor's past come to the surface, and she's reminded of the little girl whose stepmother beat her or locked her in a room for some small offense, like getting dirty.

When she told her father she wanted to live with her biological mother—but couldn't because the woman wasn't capable of taking care of her—the dad responding by putting the 6-year-old in foster care.

Her adoptive parents gave her a room with pink-and-white curtains and a sense of value she'd never known, but they faced their own demons. They divorced when she was in middle school, and her adoptive father killed himself when she was a high school freshman.

So, when Taylor sees a child misbehaving, she's reminded that she acted the same way, long before the term "at risk" was used. She recalls the embarrassment she felt, standing in line for free lunches, or the hurt she internalized, wondering why her parents didn't want her.

"By all accounts, my mom should be angry at the world, but she's not, and it's a beautiful thing to watch her blossom," said Taylor's only child, Kelli McBride. "It's made me unbelievably grateful for who she is, and it's also a testament that, even if life is difficult, you don't give up. You keep going and you don't let it make you bitter."

Taylor has tapped into her own experiences to make a difference in the lives of other children as she's led various programs during 28 years with the YMCA. She initially went to work at the Alexandria facility because she could take her daughter with her, and has advanced from a preschool teacher to chief operating officer—the No. 2 executive—of the entire Rappahannock Area YMCA system.

Her past is as much a part of her as her ever-present smile and warm greeting, whether she's encountering an old friend



or meeting someone for the first time.

“It’s made me the person I am today,” she said. “Would I be as passionate about the youth as I am if all that hadn’t happened to me?”

Passion is one word used often to describe the 52-year-old, who runs, cycles and lift weights at whichever YMCA she happens to be working.

“She’s probably one of the most passionate people I’ve ever met,” said Jim Howard, who serves on the board of the King George YMCA, which Taylor opened in 2008. “She has that enthusiasm, that love. She’s just a very special person. She not only talks about the mission, but she lives it, and it’s easy for her to tell it and get others to participate in it.”

Rappahannock Area YMCA CEO Barney Reiley has watched her suggest, then implement, signature YMCA programs such as swimming lessons

for second-graders or Bright Beginnings, which provides backpacks and other supplies for children at the start of the school year.

“We gave her the ball, and she ran with it,” Reiley said. “We’ve been able to accomplish a lot, building branches and rolling out programs, and I’ve been blessed to have her in my orbit. Certainly, her success has been all on her own.”

Taylor credits those who helped her along the way, including Reiley, whom she said told her to “go for it” whenever she offered an idea. He encouraged her to get her college degree, which she earned at the University of Mary Washington, 22 years after she graduated from Gar-Field High School in Woodbridge. (She dropped out of high school for a while, then returned and got her diploma.)

Reiley also showed her the ropes of fundraising, and she estimates she talked individuals and businesses into donating more than half a million dollars for various YMCA programs or

playgrounds. In recent years, one of her primary focuses has been the Summer Learning Loss Prevention program, which is now called Power Scholars.

In May 2015, Taylor proposed implementing the program for at-risk, rising third-graders in King George the following summer. It was already being held in other YMCAs, and Taylor told the King George Board of Supervisors, “We have got to do this in King George.”

For five weeks, students are exposed to lessons, cultural experiences and fun field trips designed to improve math and reading—instead of losing those skills, which often happens in the summer.

When she mentioned the idea to King George School Superintendent Rob Benson, he liked it so much that the two decided to put the program in place that very summer. Taylor raised all the needed money—the supplies, books and enrichment activities cost \$1,500 per child—and pulled off the program within months.

“She’s been such a consistent champion,” Benson said, adding she raises the money or gets in-kind donations to cover supplies. “It’s been a great partnership, and a lot of kids have benefited.”

The program has grown from 20 kids in one King George school to 320 students in three counties this past summer.

“To know that I’m helping at-risk kids when I was one myself,” Taylor said, “that’s how you give back. It’s about impacting lives, and that’s just magical when a human being reaches out to another human being, just because.”

As for how she was able to transform her life as an at-risk youth into a successful professional, Taylor credits both divine assistance and the love she found from starting her own family. She was 22 when she and her first husband, Malcolm Clark, had Kelli, and she wondered how any parent could ever give up a child.

She also found healing through faith and the relationship with her mother-in-law,

Dot Clark, who showed her the value of kindness, and that love is unconditional.

Even though Taylor and Malcolm Clark divorced, and she later married Barry Taylor, Elizabeth Taylor still talks daily with her former mother-in-law. She calls Dot Clark her role model, the woman who’s filled the maternal void in her life.

“Liz is a kind, sweet person, and she checks on me to see how I’m doing or if I need anything. She’s always treated me like that,” Clark said. “That’s the kind of person she is.” ♦

## ~~THE TABLE~~ from p. 23

~~that those with diabetes or high blood pressure couldn’t tolerate the high levels of salt and sugar in prepackaged foods.~~

~~“They were either throwing it out or trading with other people,” she said. “We started saying, ‘There’s got to be a better way to do this.’”~~

~~At the time, she didn’t know Miller or Cook, except as fellow church members. But the three found themselves drawn together in the pursuit of healthier options.~~

~~At first, one of them would camp out at the Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank, from which the team buys a lot of staples, and snatch up any fresh food that came through. That became too labor intensive, and the team explored avenues to buy produce so they’d have a consistent amount each week.~~

~~Borst connected LLC with Westmoreland County farmer Veronica Flores and her family. She sells The Table crates of items, at reduced rates, after she returns from Northern Virginia markets on Sundays.~~

~~Initially, the team stored cantaloupes and carrots in hallways or under pews until Cook started seeking grants to help the program.~~

~~One from the diocese provided produce in 2013; another was specifically for fruit. A \$30,000 grant from the Honeywell Foundation and administered~~



## ELIZABETH TAYLOR

**Hometown:** Born in Groton, Conn., but grew up in Dale City.

**Family:** Married to Barry Taylor with one daughter, three stepdaughters and three brothers.

**Occupation:** Worked for the YMCA for 28 years.

**Who is your role model?** Dot Clark, my daughter’s grandma. We know her as “Paw Paw.”

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I was an at-risk youth, I dropped out of high school in 1984, but did finish high school. It took me 20 years to complete my college degree. I graduated from UMW in 2006.

**What’s your favorite book?** My favorite book is “The Hardest Peace” by Kara Tippetts.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Corrie ten Boom. One of my favorite quotes from her is: “The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation.”

## DIFFERENCE MAKER

HALL OF FAME • CLASS OF 2019

# Herb Collins

## Collector's contributions to Caroline County 'priceless'

BY PAMELA GOULD

FILE PHOTO BY THE FREE LANCE-STAR

**F**or anyone seeking information on the history of Caroline County, the place to begin is not on the internet, but with Herb Collins.

The 87-year-old county native will know the answer and, according to Caroline Historical Society President Wayne Brooks, will provide it faster and more thoroughly than any online search engine.

In fact, local historians wish there was a way to download the vast amount of information stored in Collins' encyclopedic mind.

It's as prized to them as the treasure trove of historic documents, rare books, furniture, portraits and artifacts he's generously donated to facilities around the county over the years.

SEE COLLINS, 40



## Q&A

**Hometown:** An area of Caroline County he refers to as Country Crossroads

**Family:** Single; engaged multiple times but never married.

**Occupation:** Retired after a career at the Smithsonian Institution.

**Who is your role model?** God. It's because of God that I have accomplished what I have.

**What is something about you that might come as a surprise to others?**

"My whole life is probably a surprise because I did not discuss it in the community a lot. I didn't want to intimidate people, and they probably wouldn't have believed it. I was just a little country boy that made good."

**What is your favorite TV show?**

"I Love Lucy."

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Maybe Mark Twain.



**COLLINS** from p. 27

“His love for history and his knowledge is amazing,” said Carolyn “Cookie” Davis, president of Historic Port Royal, who marvels at his memory of dates and places and his joy at sharing what he knows.

“It doesn’t matter who he talks to,” she added. “It could be the maintenance man and he will find a way to throw in a bit of history.”

Collins grew up surrounded by history and has been fascinated by it for as long as he can remember.

He was born at Green Falls in a house that dates to 1711 and has served over the years as a tavern, store and post office. The property has been in Collins’ family since roughly 1800, when ancestor Robert Wright II bought it, according to records for its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It is through the Wright family that Collins traces his lineage to the aunt of George Washington.

Collins grew up among family heirlooms, listening to his mother share stories of bygone days and notable visitors. One he enjoys sharing is that he was born in the room Washington, then commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, and French Gen. Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau occupied on the return from their decisive victory at the Battle of Yorktown.

In fact, visitors can find their way to the Green Falls estate by following roadway signs tracing the Washington–Rochambeau Revolutionary Route.

**SHARING HIS COLLECTIONS**

Since retiring 27 years ago, Collins has been doing what many at that stage of life do—downsizing.

But for Collins, who spent a lifetime gathering documents and artifacts to preserve county and U.S. history, his aren’t the kinds of items one puts in a neighborhood yard sale.

Like the original portrait of

Queen Caroline for whom the county was named. That now hangs in the circuit courtroom at the county courthouse.

Or the paintings of 20 notable Caroline residents whose portraits he commissioned. Those hang in the Portrait Gallery in Port Royal’s Town Hall.

Or the White House china he bought over the years. That prized collection fills a room at the Port Royal Museum of American History, which he helped establish and for which Davis said he provided 90 percent of the contents.

Or the massive collection of genealogical information and rare books he painstakingly assembled. Those items, which local historians estimate are worth millions of dollars, are now in a room bearing Collins’ name in the county’s main library, available for researchers.

Collins’ first recollection of family history dates to when he was age 3 and he says he’s always been struck by its importance. It’s a passion that formed the lifelong bachelor’s legacy and what some say became his surrogate family.

“In my opinion, history is his family and he wants to maintain his family,” said David Upshaw, a Caroline County native and distant cousin. “His family members are the people from the past that he keeps alive.”

**A REMARKABLE CAREER**

Collins refers to himself as an author, historian and conservationist. He documented history by writing 25 books, preserved it by collecting key items from U.S. presidents and political conventions, and left a permanent example of it by re-assembling 700 acres of his family homestead.

As he approaches his ninth decade, Collins is frequently philosophical, offering observations and opinions from the perspective of someone who not only has a keen interest in history, but also had firsthand access to the country’s history makers during his career in the

nation’s capital.

Collins attended college in Richmond before being drafted during the Korean War. He served at the Pentagon in Army Intelligence and then applied to three places in D.C. to resume civilian life—the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives and the Library of Congress. The Smithsonian called first, launching a three-decade career that Collins said never felt like work.

“Who in the world could handle the top hat of Abraham Lincoln but me,” he asked, recalling that extraordinary opportunity.

Collins rubbed elbows with current and former presidents and their families, including Harry Truman, Lady Bird Johnson and Jackie Kennedy, attended political conventions of both parties to gather items of Americana, and developed a talent for recognizing value. Along the way, he wound up giving away one of his own shirts so former President Dwight Eisenhower could have his wish of being buried in full Army uniform.

Collins started as a junior curator at the Smithsonian and rose to the role of executive director at the National Museum of American History. He also helped found the National Postal Museum and establish the National Museum of the American Indian, savoring every moment.

Collins graduated from college prepared to teach and serve as a guidance counselor but believes the path he walked was ordained for him.

“I just feel like the opportunity I’ve had was a God-given opportunity,” he said.

In 2015, the Virginia General Assembly and Congress recognized his service to the state and nation.

**RETURNING HOME**

During his decades in Washington, Collins often returned to visit Caroline, never forgetting his roots.

“Herb could have gone anywhere in the world (after retirement) and he chose to

move back to Caroline. That’s where his heart is,” said Upshaw, who like others, checks on Collins nowadays to assess his welfare.

Family has always been important to Collins and he was especially close to his mother, crediting her with instilling the values that guided his life including faith and the importance of giving back. He was engaged multiple times, but never married and feels it was for the best.

“If I had gotten married, I wouldn’t have accomplished all I did in life,” he said.

That lifestyle enabled him to afford the massive collection of rare items—that plus some prudent stock market investing and never taking a vacation, he said. His vision was always clear.

“I wanted to make sure my county always had something to remind them of what came before us,” he said.

“Herb is priceless,” said Brooks of the Caroline Historical Society. “He has contributed so much.”

And those contributions continue. Brooks said he gets calls or emails every week from people across the country conducting family research and he repeatedly turns to Collins for help.

Collins also continues seeking items to fill voids in the stories told at the Museum of American History, said Davis of Historic Port Royal.

“Working with him made me understand we are who we are based on what we’ve come through. The items he donated tell the story,” she said. “It’s only when you see and have those visuals that you really see how things were, where we’ve come from.”

As much as they value the astounding collections Collins has given to tell the county’s history, Davis and her colleagues value him more.

“I just want him to be around for a long, long time because I’m learning from him every day,” she said. “He’s a teacher.”❖

# ADVOCACY RESTORATION FRIENDS OF THE RIVER

## Q&A

### THE MICKS:

**Hometown:** His, Fredericksburg; hers, Spotsylvania

**Family:** A daughter, Katherine

**Occupations:** Retired teachers; still operate Rappahannock Outdoor Center

### BILL MICKS:

**Who is your role model?** My role model was my Boy Scout leader, George Grumble.

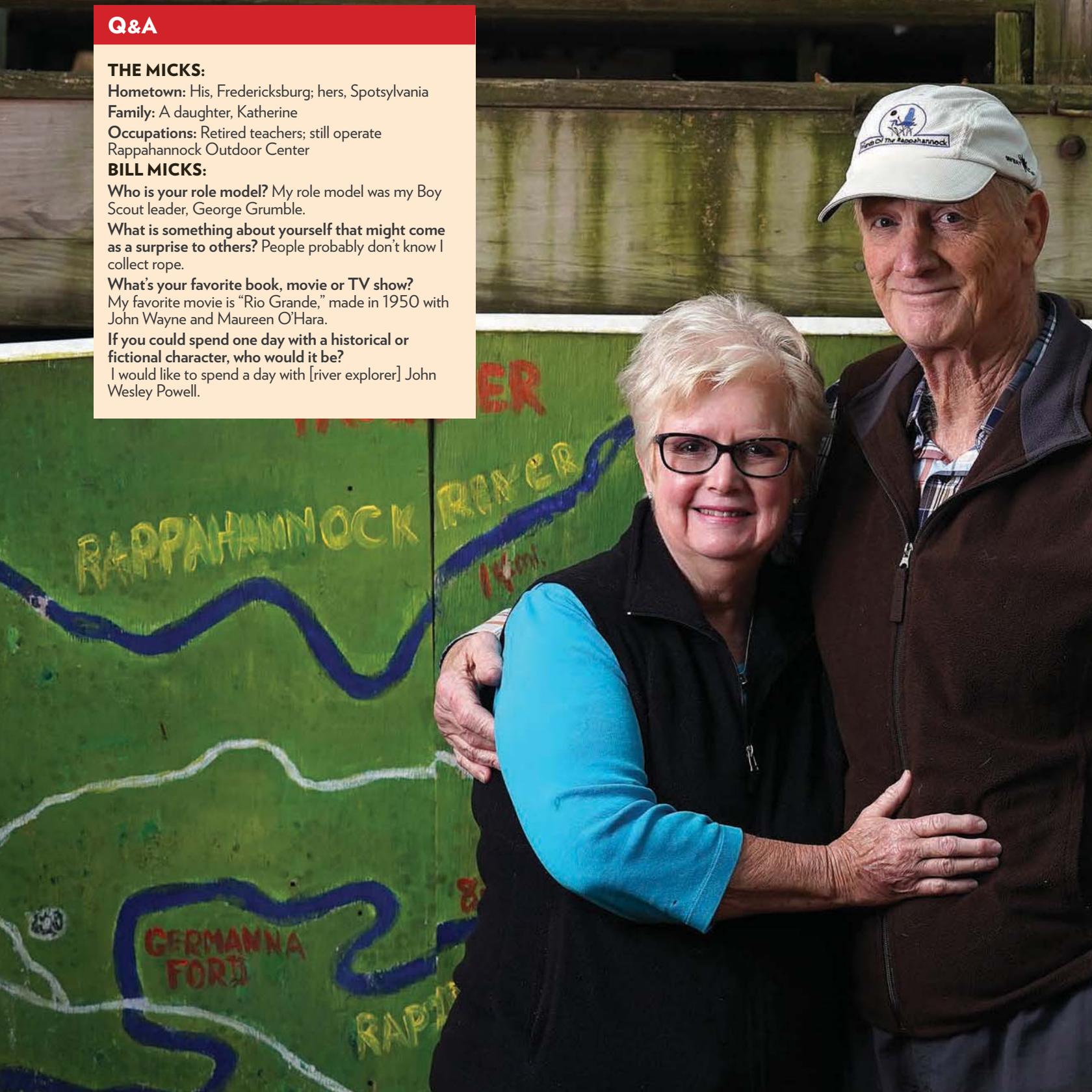
**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** People probably don't know I collect rope.

**What's your favorite book, movie or TV show?**

My favorite movie is "Rio Grande," made in 1950 with John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?**

I would like to spend a day with [river explorer] John Wesley Powell.



ATION ED  
RAPPANHA

## DIFFERENCE MAKER

HALL OF FAME • CLASS OF 2019

DISCOVER FREDERICKSBURG

# *Bill and Denise Micks*

## Couple connects visitors and residents to the Rappahannock

BY ROB HEDELT

PHOTO BY SUZANNE CARR ROSSI

**I**t would be impossible to list all the ways Bill and Denise Micks have protected, preserved and provided access for people to the Rappahannock River.

The Micks' canoe and kayak business, which they started in their College Heights backyard, eventually grew into the Virginia Outdoor Center, a full-service river trip business below Normandy Village in Fredericksburg. The couple said their efforts were always guided by a central goal.

"Finding ways to connect people to this Rappahannock River is what we're about," said Bill Micks. These days, he said, the center works to "serve nonprofits, Scout troops, churches, the YMCA, schools, parks and rec groups and others like them."

Micks said the couple has always defined success for the Outdoor Center as being able to "pay our bills, pay the kids who work for us and help nonprofit groups like the Friends of

the Rappahannock be financially successful. There were stretches where we'd go years without making any money."

Of course, it's the understated way of this husband and wife—both locals who attended Spotsylvania High School—to seldom blow their own horns.

When they talk about supporting local nonprofit groups, you have to prod a bit before the two retired school teachers reluctantly take credit for actions that go beyond simple support.

Explaining how the couple moved their business to the property along the river off Fall Hill Avenue, Micks noted that they "signed a lease with the Franklin family, mortgaged our house and built this Rappahannock Outdoor Center building. It was a scary step, and I had to ask Denise to sign on that dotted line next to me."

Micks said the outfitting business, which provides canoes, kayaks, paddleboards, bikes and other

SEE MICKS, 38



transportation, grew quickly once moving to the new space. At that point, he said, Friends of the Rappahannock had become a solid nonprofit agency with a small office downtown.

“We invited them to move in upstairs, and they’ve been here ever since,” said Micks, who said the group wasn’t charged for the space. “We’ve always supported any and all of their programs and fundraisers.”

The couple said there came a time later when the property they were leasing became available for purchase. They were part of an effort to raise money, the property was purchased and the “building and property was gifted to Friends of the Rappahannock.”

“John Tippet led the crusade to come up with the money to secure the property for FOR forever, with a conservation easement on it,” said Micks. “Long after Denise and I are gone, the organization will continue to serve the river and this community.”

Denise said as a child in Spotsylvania, she fished in a pond in her backyard and spent all the hours she could enjoying the outdoors.

“I was certainly not allergic to dirt or the outdoors,” she said.

Bill grew up in Fredericksburg and went to school in Spotsylvania because the aunt who raised him was a principal at a county school.

His exposure and connection to the river came through Boy Scouts. His first trip went from Ely’s Ford to Motts Run with Dr. George Brumble, who taught canoeing for the American Red Cross.

“I just loved it out there from the start,” said Micks, who noted that Brumble kept in touch with youngsters who’d gotten the paddling bug, taking them on trips down the Rappahannock and Shenandoah rivers.

When the college years came, Bill went off to Virginia Commonwealth University, Denise to Old Dominion Uni-

versity, eventually meeting and marrying back home. They put in full careers as teachers: Bill as a physical education teacher at Drew Middle School and Stafford High; Denise teaching for all but one year at Chancellor Elementary School.

Their outfitting business began on a shoestring in the backyard of their College Avenue house.

Micks said the business operated in its first year with three Grumman aluminum canoes and they didn’t have a trailer yet: “We had suction cups and 2-by-4s we’d put on people’s cars when they came to pick up the boats.”

The business took off as Micks began teaching classes and running trips, up to six boats the second year and up to 30 a few years later. Soon enough, they negotiated a 30-year lease on the property where the Outdoor Center sits.

Denise said in the early years, they had one or two young employees, most of them students of Bill’s.

“Now, there are 25 to 30 who work here in the summer,” she said.

Micks said although he’s often the one who customers and groups see, Denise has always been a full partner from the start.

“When we started, I was still coaching and would be away much of the time,” he said. “She’d deal with customers Fridays and Saturdays, loading boats on trailers, paying bills, answering emails and fixing food for kids that worked here on the weekends. At the new building, she continued to run the show.”

The couple noted that operating the paddle/trip business and having summers off as teachers was a mix that worked, and said there was also always a perfect symbiosis between the business and FOR.

“We’re extremely compatible and complement each other in many ways,” said Micks, adding that the couple always knew that the stronger FOR could become the better off the

river would be.

Added Denise, “We have done everything we possibly could to support them. We’ve helped with fundraising, provided boats so people could connect to the river and learn its story.”

Denise said one drawback for her husband, who lives to get out on the river, is that he has spent so much time getting others onto it that he seldom gets to enjoy it himself from May to October.

“He waits until cold weather to get out there,” Denise said.

Her husband noted that he has many different spots he enjoys paddling on the Rappahannock and elsewhere in late fall, in winter and early spring.

“Denise comes with me, because she loves it as much as I do,” he said. “The one plus at those times of year is that we have the rivers to ourselves.”

The pair said they strongly believe that putting people out on the beautiful and scenic Rappahannock River is the best way to make them advocates for it, noting that first-timers are always struck by how unsullied it is by development.

“Decades ago, when I first got out there, in the late ’50s, I was struck by that same thing, by the river’s unspoiled natural beauty,” said Micks. “And the river above Fredericksburg hasn’t changed from then, the corridor still as rich and green. Now it will stay that way because of the conservation easements on the shorelines.”

Acknowledging that he and Denise have played a part in environmental efforts and fundraisers, Micks said it feels like it’s all gone by quickly.

“I could not have imagined, and really do feel proud of the piece of the pie we’ve been for environmental efforts,” said Micks. “We physically gave it a home, so it was already here when the effort to buy the property happened. It always made sense for it and us to be here together.” ❖

## DIFFERENCE MAKER

HALL OF FAME • CLASS OF 2019

# Florence Ridderhof

## She's an integral part of all that is 'good in this community'

BY KRISTIN DAVIS  
PHOTO BY PETER CIHELKA

**F**lorence Ridderhof was a married mother of four the first time she heard that husbands sometimes abused their wives.

It was 1976.

"No one wanted to talk about domestic violence," said Kathy Anderson, executive director of Empowerhouse, the region's nonprofit that serves survivors of the crime. "There were people in the community who didn't want to acknowledge it."

But now Ridderhof knew, thanks to a group of Fredericksburg women who were mobilizing. Soon, she and others were opening their homes—at risk to themselves and their own families—to shelter women and children with nowhere else to go.

By the end of 1979, the newly founded Rappahannock Council on Domestic Violence—now Empowerhouse—opened the doors to the region's first

shelter for domestic violence victims.

If you were going to talk about a need, she believed, you had to do something about it. And there was a never-ending supply of those—in her community and around the world.

It is why Ridderhof, who turns 90 this year and lives in the same home she once opened to people seeking refuge, continues to serve her community through Fredericksburg United Methodist Church and Micah Ministries for the Homeless, and through liturgical dance and art.

"She sees everybody as a child of God. No matter what their station is or their circumstances are, she greets them all," said longtime friend Libby Wasam.

"Florence was one of the key people in my coming to understand what church and community life is all about," said Meghann Cotter, executive servant-leader of Micah Ministries who first met Ridderhof as

SEE RIDDERHOF, 39

## Q&amp;A

**Hometown:** Fredericksburg

**Family:** Four grown children

**Occupation:** Activist

**Who is your role model?** My mother and my sister were always there with kindness for all people, a strong faith, an interest in caring for others and working in church and community. There were and are numerous others along the way.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** When Jose Limon, a great modern dancer, performed at Mary Washington, I was in the master dance class and someone was asked to do some sewing for his costume ... that was me!

**What's your favorite book?** An avid reader, it is difficult to choose, but I reread Jane Austen's novels often and enjoy George Eliot's "Middlemarch," plus good biographies.

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** I was on the staff at Kenmore for about 12 years and would have liked to meet Betty Washington Lewis.





a child attending United Methodist. “She’s one of those people you saw doing everything and who was a part of everything. She still is. I honestly can’t think of a thing that is good in this community that Florence has not been a part of.”

Ridderhof grew up on Cornell Street in Fredericksburg, the daughter of an economic analyst, who commuted to Washington, and a nurturing homemaker, who took on causes like low-income housing.

Her father wanted her to be good at numbers, and Ridderhof was often the only female in her math classes. Her mother wanted her to be the church organist, but once her sister taught her how to knit, she never stopped.

Ridderhof still plies her craft several afternoons a week in a studio at Libertytown Arts Workshop downtown.

On Sundays, the family took *The New York Times*—to this day, she reads two newspapers every morning—and attended United Methodist, where she watched her mother lovingly serve her church community.

After graduating from high school, Ridderhof went to Mary Washington College. She majored in psychology but found her passion in the school’s dance program. Like knitting, she never gave it up.

Today, Ridderhof is a member of the Sacred Dance Ensemble in Fredericksburg, practicing every Sunday afternoon and performing at community events and before congregations and nursing home residents.

At 24, she married a Marine named David. His military service took them across the country.

“He was a California boy who fell in love with Fredericksburg,” she said, and in 1976, they returned here with their children, settling in a house two streets from where Ridderhof grew up.

She hadn’t been back long when she found herself at that meeting on domestic violence.

The next years were busy

ones as the group raised awareness and funds for the cause. Ridderhof stayed on for decades, doing intakes, answering calls on the domestic violence hotline and serving on the nonprofit organization’s board of directors.

A community that once struggled to acknowledge the problem now readily opens its pocketbook to aid it. Today, Empowerhouse employs the equivalent of 23 full-time staff and serves dozens of women and children a year in Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania, Stafford, Caroline and King George counties.

“So many people knew somebody [who experienced domestic violence] but didn’t know what to do,” Anderson said. “We are so lucky and grateful to Florence and others who changed that.”

It wasn’t the only thing Ridderhof helped change. She saw other, urgent needs: people who needed mental health services but couldn’t afford them. People without homes. People going hungry. Friends going through hard times. Elderly people with no one to visit them.

People asked her—people still ask her—how she keeps busy. “I prefer involved,” she said. “I like to be involved in my community, in my church, in living.”

There was too much to do to keep track of every organization she joined or helped found or lent a hand to. Even now, there is too much to do.

But a story in *The Free Lance—Star* in 2003 captured a snapshot of her contributions when the Friends of the Mary Washington College—Community Symphony Orchestra awarded her the Citizen Salute Award for what was then a lifetime of work: longtime supporter of the arts. Member community of Friends of the Orchestra. Charter member and treasurer of Friends of Mary Washington College Dance. Fredericksburg Festival of the Arts board member. Charter member of Sacred Dance. Founding member of the Fredericksburg Spinners and Weavers Guild. Fredericksburg Counseling Services

board member and member of Rebuilding Together. Red Cross Volunteer. Volunteer with the Thurman Brisben Center for the homeless.

The list went on: Mission trips to South Dakota and Guatemala and Haiti. Navy Relief volunteer. “An active member of the Fredericksburg United Methodist Church, where she serves on the Foundation Board, the Finance Committee and United Methodist Women.”

Two years after that, the region’s churches would found the Micah Hospitality Center, a place for the city’s homeless to get showers, clothing, haircuts and help with resources, benefits, applications, prescription requests and anything else they might need.

“She was very integrally involved in the creation of Micah when the churches pulled together lay leaders to dream up what it would look like,” said Cotter, the executive servant-leader.

Ridderhof has volunteered there at least once a week ever since.

“It’s very difficult for some people to go into an office, to answer questions. It’s intimidating. As a military wife, I was in circumstances when my husband was away. Not everyone was kind. Some people come in with letters they got and they think something bad is going to happen because something bad has happened,” she said. “You cannot generalize about the homeless. There are people who live so near the edge that they are one catastrophe away from being on the street. The car stops working, so they can’t go to work. They can’t go to work so they can’t pay their rent. They lose their home.”

It can happen that easily.

“It is interesting and it is heartbreaking,” Ridderhof said. “There are days when it is hard to get in my car and drive home knowing the rain is not going to get me wet and ruin all my belongings.”

But she keeps coming back.❖

## Q&A

**Hometown:** Hanover

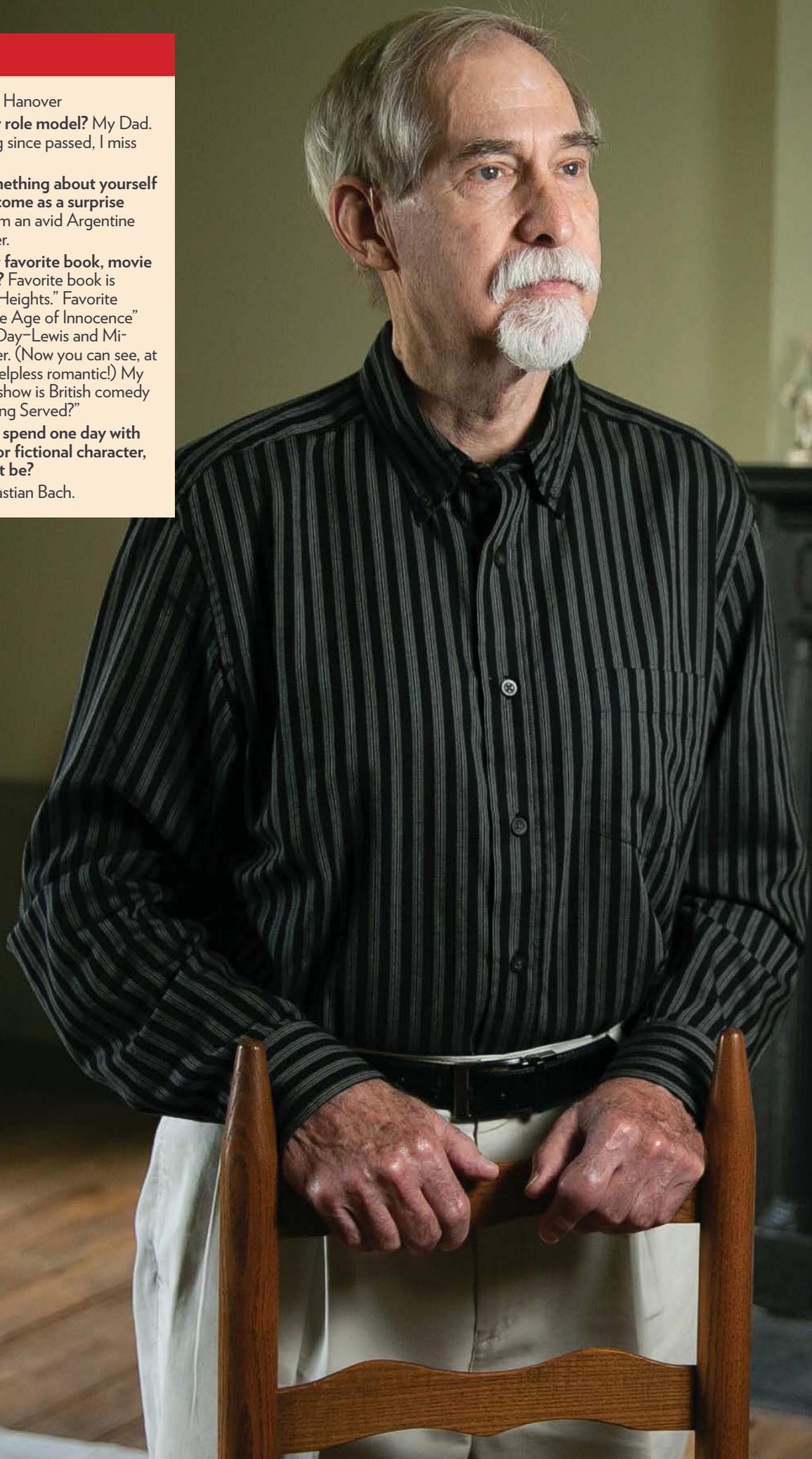
**Who is your role model?** My Dad. Though long since passed, I miss him much.

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I'm an avid Argentine Tango dancer.

**What's your favorite book, movie or TV show?** Favorite book is "Wuthering Heights." Favorite movie is "The Age of Innocence" with Daniel Day-Lewis and Michelle Pfeiffer. (Now you can see, at heart I'm a helpless romantic!) My favorite TV show is British comedy "Are You Being Served?"

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?**

Johann Sebastian Bach.



**DIFFERENCE  
MAKER**HALL OF FAME •  
CLASS OF 2019*Norman  
Schools***He ‘tells  
the story of  
the layers  
of history in  
Stafford’****BY LINDLEY ESTES**  
PHOTO BY MIKE MORONES

**N**orman Schools came to Falmouth because of a house. The Moncure Conway House’s brick façade has stood watch over the Rappahannock River for 212 years, and it has been the project that drove Schools and his late wife, Lenetta, to research the history of Stafford County and advocate for stories that often are overlooked.

With the house came the hamlet of Falmouth itself, which Schools calls a gem “waiting for people to discover it in the midst of traffic.” Schools’ research on the area has led him to become a longtime member of the Stafford County Historical Society and to serve on multiple local boards.

**SEE SCHOOLS, 41**

## SCHOOLS from p. 29

According to friend and fellow historical society member Frank White, Schools “is well known in the county for his love and knowledge of history, his outstanding service and his willingness to lend a helping hand in the community.”

Norman and Lenetta Schools moved here from Hanover County after seeing the Moncure Conway house advertised in the *National Trust Magazine*. In the late 1990s, they began the restoration—Schools is careful to use that term over “renovation,” since he is restoring the home to what it would have looked like in its original, Federal-style glory.

“I already had a love of history and wanted to know who lived here,” he said. “I knew the importance of the Conway family and found the 1904 autobiography of Moncure Conway. It all spiraled from there.”

Because of Schools’ efforts, the Moncure Conway House is listed as a Virginia State Landmark, is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is designated by the National Park Service as an Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Historic Site, which denotes sites linked to emancipation.

Built by Scottish immigrant and local mill owner James Vass in 1807, the home was later occupied by the Beale family. The Conways obtained the house in 1838 and the home’s most famous son, Moncure, was an outspoken abolitionist. According to Schools’ research, Conway was the only descendant of the nation’s Founding Fathers to actively lead slaves to freedom.

“He was the black sheep of his family,” Schools said. “What he did was very hard to do. As a Southerner, standing up for his convictions meant he was under the threat of physical harm, that he had to give up friends and family. ... He gave up all to oppose slavery.”

To research the site’s history, Schools used local resources, visited national archives, searched archives at the Library of Virginia, and traveled to

Dickinson College and Columbia University. He and Lenetta even visited a Conway descendant in New Hampshire, and later shared what they learned with the Stafford Historical Society.

Schools also found the descendants of Conway’s father’s slaves in Yellow Springs, Ohio, who still call their settlement the “Conway Colony.” Lenetta and White met them in Yellow Springs and represented Stafford County at the unveiling of an Ohio state historical marker in 2002. One side honored Moncure Conway, while the other side honored members of the community founded by those former slaves.

From there, Schools said his scope evolved. He went on to secure markers and landmark statuses for more buildings that

### Schools “is well known in the county for his love and knowledge of history, his outstanding service and his willingness to lend a helping hand in the community.”

are significant to the county’s African American history.

In 2012, he wrote a nomination for the former Stafford Training School, also known as H.H. Poole School and The Rowser Building. He wrote a nomination for the same building to be added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2013, and later nominated it for a Virginia Department of Transportation Historical Highway Marker. All were successful.

He did much the same for the Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church and Cemetery in 2017. And, along with his wife, Schools worked to protect the Union Church in Falmouth.

Lenetta Schools also had the vision to help start the local Juneteenth celebration in 2006. And Schools wrote a book called “Virginia Shade: An African American History of Falmouth Virginia.”

White called the book “the most descriptive and informa-

tive account of African American History in the area since ‘A Different Story’ was written by Ruth Coder Fitzgerald in 1979.”

Schools said the book was a labor of love and grew out of a desire to pass on what he had learned. All the couple’s efforts were based “on the theme of reconciliation,” he said. “My wife was interested in everyone getting along. She spread joy. She was my inspiration behind the scenes. Lenetta was a very dear person, and I miss her.”

M.C. Morris has known Schools since 2006, and she, too, fondly remembers his late wife.

“Lenetta is missed by all of us,” she said. “She was a force of nature, an entirely positive force of nature.”

Morris first encountered the couple’s research and advocacy

eventually the first Yankees in Falmouth event in 2007.

“It is so hard to bring history to life,” Morris said. “But they opened their house and let people stand on the place where something happened. It was entirely compassionate and inclusive, and that’s best way to learn about local history and how important it is to the national historic landscape.”

Schools said what drives him is “the history that isn’t known. What makes history fascinating and rewarding is when you uncover something not talked about much. I’m looking for something, get frustrated, but then find something I never knew to look for.”

It makes Schools a historian with integrity, who tells the real story and stands up for those history has forgotten. It’s a trait he said he picked up from his father.

Schools was born in Norfolk, to a father who spent his entire career in the Navy. He followed in his father’s footsteps and served from 1967 to 1971 in the Navy on the USS Puget Sound. But by that time, his father had instilled in him a sense of history—and of integrity—that has guided his life’s work.

“It all started at Jamestown in 1957,” he said. His father was from King and Queen County, and during the 350th anniversary reenactment the family attended, some of the local Native American reenactors called to him by name. They were childhood friends, and Schools said he couldn’t believe that in that huge crowd, they knew his dad and singled out the family to talk with. Ever since, he has been interested in history.

After the Navy, Schools went into business for himself preserving historic structures with his company, Virginia Restorations. He’s never stopped revering the past, and the Moncure Conway House is an ongoing project. Schools sees himself as a steward—rather than the home’s owner—who toils to preserve the place so the next generation can learn about the people who lived there and stood up for their convictions.❖

## DIFFERENCE MAKER

HALL OF FAME • CLASS OF 2019

# Marguerite Bailey Young

## Her contributions to city, its children are ‘without parallel’

BY CATHY JETT

PHOTO BY MIKE MORONES

**M**arguerite Bailey Young said that her sister used to tease that Young “was involved in every organization known to man—and made up a few.”

But the late Florence Bailey’s teasing contained more than a grain of truth.

Young, 91, has been a driving force—and, in many cases, continues to play a key role—as an officer and board member on so many organizations that it’s hard to believe that she also had a lengthy career as a teacher, assistant elementary school principal, and then director of instruction for Fredericksburg’s public schools.

Her dedication to community service included helping develop and maintain Hazel Hill Apartments after realizing there was a need for affordable housing in Fredericksburg. She still serves on the board of the Hazel Hill Healthcare Project, which provides nursing services and health education for the 145 families living at the complex.

Young also served on the Mary Washington Healthcare Board of Trustees from 1988 to 2000, was a founding member of its Healthcare Assembly, and is a member of the Central Virginia Health Services Board of Directors. In addition, she serves on the President’s Community Advisory Committee on Diversity at the University of Mary Washington; and is the treasurer of the Shiloh Baptist Church (Old Site) Church Aid Committee and chair

of its audit committee. And she just gave up her position as treasurer of the Fredericksburg Branch of the NAACP, which she helped to resurrect and sustain.

These and many other positions have won her accolades over the years, including Fredericksburg Area Citizen of the Year by the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce and Reunion Dedication Honoree by the Walker–Grant Alumni Association. She was honored by Dominion Energy and the Library of Virginia as part of the sixth annual “Strong Men & Women in Virginia History” awards last year.

“Everything I did, everything I was involved with, I cared about,” said Young. “I would do the work.”

Hard work, helping others and faith in God were values instilled by her parents when she was growing up as the second of eight children in the close-knit Bailey family in Accomack County, she said. It wasn’t unusual for her mother to tell one of her brothers to cut wood and stack it on the front porch of an elderly neighbor, or for her mother to pick up children at school and drive them home when the weather was bad.

Young graduated from Virginia State College and taught business and English in Emporia. She knew shorthand, and a lawyer in Emporia who was a member of the NAACP asked her to take dictation and do transcripts for cases he was working on. They included *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward*

## Q&amp;A

**Hometown:** Accomack County (on Virginia’s Eastern Shore)

**Family:** Parents James and Alma Bailey had eight children. I had four brothers (two now deceased), three sisters (one deceased). I have a son, Lawrence; five grandchildren; and three great-grandsons.

**Occupation:** Retired public school teacher and administrator

**Who is your role model?** My parents and Gladys P. Todd, a Fredericksburg educator, humanitarian, activist and leader

**What is something about yourself that might come as a surprise to others?** I can think of nothing that might be a surprise to others, as I think I am an open book and I talk too much.

**What are your favorite books?** “Three Minutes with God: A Weekly Devotional for Inspiration and Encouragement” by Jarvis E. Bailey; and “Giving It All Away: The Doris Buffett Story” by Michael Zitz

**If you could spend one day with a historical or fictional character, who would it be?** Mary McLeod Bethune, an educator, humanitarian, civil rights activist, stateswoman and philanthropist.



County, which was one of five cases combined into *Brown v. Board of Education*. That case led to the eventual overturning of racial segregation in U.S. public schools.

After eight years in Emporia, Young returned to Accomack and was about to start teaching there when her brother told her there was an opening for a business teacher at Walker–Grant High School. He suggested she type a note asking for the job, and offered to give it to the superintendent. She got an interview and started work in Fredericksburg on Sept. 12, 1957. That was the beginning of a career in the city’s schools that didn’t end with her retirement in 1988. She was called back the next year to serve as interim principal of Walker–Grant Middle School.

“Mrs. Young taught me how to teach. She was a teacher’s teacher and ... principal and ... director of instruction. Her contributions to the welfare of the children of Fredericksburg have been without parallel,” said Gaye Adegbalola, who nominated Young for *The Free Lance–Star’s* Difference Makers. .

Adegbalola, who would become a teacher in the city’s schools, was a student in Young’s English and business classes at Walker–Grant High School. Her son, Juno Lumumba, was a student at Matthew Fontaine Maury School when Young was its principal.

“She taught her students beyond the classroom. She taught discipline. She taught us to strive for perfection. She gave loving encouragement to all of us. She, along with many of Walker–Grant’s teachers, taught us to cheer loudest when you are losing. Unconditional love!” Adegbalola wrote in her nomination.

Young said that she wanted to teach business at James Monroe High School after Walker–Grant became Fredericksburg Middle School when the city schools were integrated. Instead, she was asked to teach seventh grade math and citizen-

ship at the middle school. She had been teaching English and business.

Young said Richard Garnett, who was the middle school principal at the time, picked her to teach a class for students who’d been held back. She said that she tailored it to the students’ real-life needs, including teaching them how to keep a checkbook and select an auto insurance policy.

“They were students that people thought wouldn’t go to high school,” Young said. “They went to James Monroe and some went on to college, both girls and boys. My students ... wanted to learn the stuff I was teaching.”

Garnett hired Young to teach business at James Monroe when he became its principal. “He said to me, that day, ‘Just keep up the standards of the business department,’” she recalled. “I told him, ‘Don’t ever tell anybody that. They have to keep up to my standards.’”

Young was promoted to principal in 1976 and eventually to director of instruction for city schools. She also secured grant funding for the city’s underprivileged schools through the federal Title I program and spearheaded programs to provide tutors and help minority students with college application costs.

“In the school system, you find out what the needs are and do what you can to help. When Rev. (Lawrence) Davies saw the need for Hazel Hill, I got asked to be on the board, and I got asked to be the secretary,” she said. “From one thing to another, that’s how you get involved.”

Adegbalola lauded Young for her work on Hazel Hill, at Shiloh Baptist and for the NAACP.

“She knows how to organize, how to mobilize, how to empower and how to be a beacon for all marginalized people,” she said.

Young added that it didn’t hurt that she knew shorthand, could take dictation and could run Walker–Grant’s mimeograph machine early in her career.

“Folks would keep calling me,” she said, “and I’d say yes.” ❖