



Editor's note: "Wandering Around Washington" is a regular, exclusive column from Joe Tennis highlighting the untold stories in the county, direct from the people who live and work here. Watch for him to wander into shops, restaurants and parks to bring you the gab and gossip — only in the Washington County News.

‘You can call a pig a butterfly ...’

ABINGDON, Va. — Emmitt Yeary’s road show most recently turned up at the regular meeting of the Washington County Board of Supervisors in Abingdon, Virginia.



Joe Tennis

On Aug. 28, the outspoken Abingdon attorney’s address was part of his latest crusade to save the Washington County Courthouse where it stands in historic Abingdon, next door to property that he owns on Main Street.

Yeary spoke about a resolution — passed unanimously on Aug. 28 — that promises to take care of the courthouse indefinitely, even if court functions move to 300 Towne Centre Drive at the location of Abingdon’s former Kmart.

But, Yeary asked, “If you do try to preserve it as a building, how much is it going to cost? Have you even thought about that?”

Refresher: This is the not the first public speaking appearance by Yeary on this matter. Why, just in the last month, he also spoke at both Abingdon Town Council meetings in August.

And it’s been on the subject of the proposed plan to move the courthouse to Kmart — as a possible solution to crowded conditions, security issues and a lack of a large parking area at the 150-year-old Washington County Courthouse.

Yeary called the resolution to protect and preserve the courthouse “mere window dressing to further what appears to be this scheme to try to locate this courthouse at Kmart.”

The attorney called that “wrong.” “Just call it, ‘Courthouse moving to the shopping center.’ That’s what it should be. You should tell it like it is,” Yeary said.

“You could call a pig a butterfly, but it’s still a pig,” Yeary added. “But move this courthouse to the shopping center, and it’s going to be like moving it to a pig pen.”

A pig pen? “I tell you this,” said Board of Supervisors Chairman Saul Hernandez, about an hour later, speaking in reference to Yeary. “If I was the developer — the owner — of that shopping center, or a small business in that shopping center, I would resent my business — and, again, this development — being called a ‘pig pen.’”

But, by that time, Yeary had walked out of the meeting.

“There’s only so much of this righteous indignation that we can take,” Hernandez quickly added with a loud tone at the microphone.

Speaking on what he called his “soap box,” Hernandez said 99% of his constituents in the Tyler District of Washington County support the plan to relocate the courthouse to the Kmart.

The decision on whether to keep the courthouse where it is or move it comes to the ballot box with a referendum on Nov. 5.



WCN FILE PHOTO

Emmitt Yeary speaks about a veterans memorial in 2015. Yeary, a longtime Abingdon attorney and Vietnam veteran, has spoken out at meetings for the Abingdon Town Council and Washington County Board of Supervisors in opposition to a proposed move of the courthouse.

WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Rick McVey loves to tell stories. Each week, McVey records children’s books for Dial-A-Story, an outreach service provided by the Washington County Public Library.

Read, record, repeat

Actor Rick McVey lends vocal talents to library’s audio program

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Rick McVey is the man with the golden voice — on and off the stage.

When the curtain’s not rising on the Barter Theatre actor, McVey loves to tell stories to a bit younger audience.

“In the great green room, there was a telephone and a red balloon and a picture of a cow jumping over the moon,” read McVey in a deep, resonant voice from “Goodnight Moon,” one of nearly 200 children’s books he has narrated.

Each week, McVey records children’s books for Dial-A-Story, an outreach service provided by the Washington County Public Library.

And the best news is the stories are only a phone call away.

Parents can dial 276-676-6234 to hear the current week’s story on the phone or visit www.wcpl.net for a list of recorded children’s stories that can be heard online.

Just like onstage, McVey said his job as a storyteller is to create vivid images, characters and events in the minds of listeners. It’s an art he takes seriously for teaching and inspiring people of all ages.

“I’ve always been a supporter of the library. Since I was a kid, I’ve thought they were great places,” said McVey, who was asked by the Abingdon library about two years ago to take the lead on making the story recordings.

“I consider this my way to help support the library and to help kids enjoy books,” said McVey.

“A father stopped me one day in a parking lot to tell me that he and his daughter listened every week. That really made my day.

“I guess one of my favorite children’s books I’ve narrated is ‘Paper Bag Princess.’ It’s a fairy tale, but it’s a true classic about what being a hero and finding true love is all about.”

A new story each week

According to Andrea Tidlow, an associate of the children’s department at the library, parents can call anytime — day or night — and listen to a new story each week.

“Rick has a fabulous, trained actor’s voice,” said Tidlow, who chooses the books from the shelves of the library, many of which relate to the seasons and holidays.

Stories are less than four minutes long and geared to children as young as 2 years of age.

“Some of the stories are hysterical. They’re wonderful for parents to hear, as well,” she said.

“I Don’t Want to Be a Frog,” “Duck on a Bike” and “A Book of Hugs” are a few recent titles.

Jill Minor, electronic resources librarian, creates an archive of the book recordings and installs them on the



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Barter Theatre actor Rick McVey reads a children’s book to siblings Sarah-Bel (left), Mariam and William during a recent visit to Washington County Public Library in Abingdon. McVey records a new book each week for Dial-A-Story, an outreach service provided by the library.

library’s webpage.

“We program the webpage to offer seasonal playlists. On our webpage, the stories are organized by spring, summer, fall and winter, with the current season at the top of the page.

“I have laughed and cried while listening to the stories. They are tender and heartwarming.

“Parents and their children can read along with the recordings. This service is a free family resource that really is so terrific. It’s a real gift to the community.”

Imaginations come alive

The actor uses his home recording studio to produce recordings that are the quality of professional podcasts and audiobooks.

“I look over the books and come up with voices for different characters in the story,” McVey said.

“I think of how I would read it if my grandkids were listening. You want to tell the story as clearly as possible. When I come up with a character voice, it’s usually with the idea that it helps the listener to picture that character.

“I take extra time to make sure that the character’s voice is distinct and consistent. Sometimes I might practice reading a line two or three times to make sure I like the sound of the character’s voice. I make sure I’m getting the story told the way I think the author intended.”

After recording a batch of stories at one time, McVey edits each narrative.

“That basically involves editing out any spaces I’ve left between lines or choosing between different takes. In a few instances, I’ll find errors when I’m editing the story and have to go back and rerecord a line or two. So, the aver-

age three-minute story might take anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes of actual recording and editing time before I have a finished file.”

The software he uses is capable of creating a lot of special effects, but he rarely uses them.

“I like the idea that the stories can stand on their own without any added effects, more as if I’m reading directly to a child than producing a piece of audio theater.”

Meant to be an actor

A full-time member of Barter Theatre’s Resident Acting Company, McVey has starred in more than 100 shows since 2005, including “Robert E. Lee,” “A Christmas Carol” (2011), “Road to Appomattox,” “Les Miserables” and most recently “Madam Buttermilk.”

Most of his career in the late 1970s and 1980s was spent in broadcasting.

He worked many years performing in and directing shows at Theatre Bristol, where he also served for a time as producing director. He was also the producing director of the “Don’t Touch That Dial!” radio theater company for six years.

A graduate of East Tennessee State University, McVey was inducted into the ETSU Department of Communications Alumni Hall of Fame in 2010.

McVey got his first exposure to live theater when he visited the Barter Theatre while a young student at Damascus Elementary.

“I’ve always thought of myself as an actor. In my heart, it felt like that’s what I should be doing.”

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