



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.

Rick Rose in retirement

What's next after Barter?

Rick Rose didn't grow some crazy beard after retirement — you know, like David Letterman did.

Rose already had a beard.

And he still sports one — now, as the retired producing artistic director at the Barter Theatre.

His time guiding the grand stage of Abingdon could have been seen as a great experiment — a 27-year era that brought in record attendance numbers, with patrons showing up by the busload.

Today, in retirement, Rose says he's leaving the Barter behind.

Well, kind of.

He hints, for one, at wanting to direct a show later in the year.

Oh, and there's something else: He's not really going anywhere.

Rose and his wife, Amanda, plan to stay in Abingdon, where they have lived for years.

"We love Abingdon," Rose said.

"I'll stay in Abingdon as long as I feel I'm not casting a shadow over Katy Brown."

Brown, you'll note, is the newly named producing artistic director for Barter Theatre. She replaced Rose.

"It's her vision that will guide the theater," Rose said. "It's her leadership. It's her art. Everything about it will be Katy Brown. Is Katy Brown me? No. And she shouldn't be. It's time for Barter to rebrand, to find a new generation and to find a new leadership and to move forward into the future. And I think Katy is perfect for doing that."

But, oh, what about Rose?

He's keeping busy — but not as much as when he worked about seven days a week for months on end.

Today, too, Rose still teaches a graduate level class, "The Business of Theatre," at Emory & Henry College.

"In the course of this semester, the kids will have to literally create a non-profit theater entity of some kind," Rose said. "It's a good class."

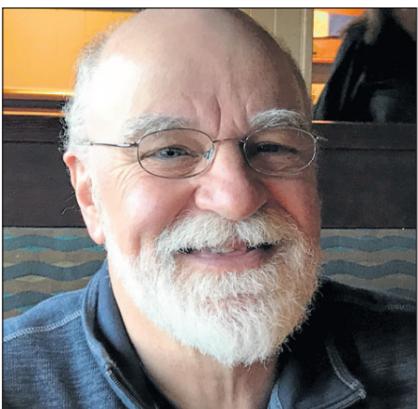
Rose also still speaks to groups, like spending a recent Thursday evening talking at the First Baptist Church of Kingsport, Tennessee.

But back to Barter: "I'm staying away from it," Rose said.

Even so, he mused, "It's hard not to miss it."

Which is likely why he is working on that new project.

"There's something that I've been developing," Rose hinted. "I haven't gotten word from Katy whether she's going to let me direct it or not. That will be entirely her decision."



Richard Rose, former producing artistic director for the Barter Theatre and now retired, plans to stay in Abingdon for the foreseeable future — and has a few projects of his own in mind.



Joe Tennis



Shelly Owens, kitchen manager at the Community Center of Abingdon, prepares fresh meals for the Meals on Wheels program. With the community center's Andy Ballard serving as head chef, the program can make better use of fresh, donated food that provides better nutrition and saves costs.

For young & old

Community Center of Abingdon bridging families and neighbors

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Abingdon, Va. — At the Community Center of Abingdon, you'll still find karaoke, bingo and dancing, but seldom is the word "senior" mentioned.

What was once a gathering place for seniors is now a place for everyone.

For the past year or more, the nonprofit organization has undergone rebranding efforts to transform the Abingdon facility into a multigenerational outlet — a place where young and old can spend time together.

In an effort to better serve the residents in Washington County, the center is reaching out to local partners to help build a bridge to families and communities.

According to Ernest Daniels, executive director of the center, one of the first phases is to build partnerships to achieve common goals.

"I think it's really important for nonprofits to partner together," said Daniels. "We have a lot of nonprofits that do similar work to help residents in Washington County, so joining our efforts will be a great benefit for everyone involved."

Washington County Habitat for Humanity relocates

Washington County Habitat for Humanity moved into the community center in December in an effort to advance its mission and to share a vision of connecting with people throughout the county.

"Through our partnership with the community center, we've already introduced our Critical Home Care program to our Meals on Wheels recipients," said Krystal Kayton, executive director of Habitat for Humanity. Kayton also serves as development director for the community center.

"When we deliver meals, we're able to give the clients information about the program. If their roof is leaking or something is wrong in their home, we're able to assist them, especially since they are homebound."

The community center also plans to partner with the Washington County Master Gardeners, which will provide landscaping in front of the community center in the spring.

Kayton is working with the Emory & Henry Bonner Scholars Program to provide a marketing proposal to boost the visibility of Habitat for Humanity in the community and to grow an online presence.

Plans are in the works to offer intergenerational cooking classes for youth and their parents and grandparents.

"Elvis is returning on Saturday, Feb. 15, for an impersonation show that lights up like Vegas," she said.

"We want the community to know we are open to all ages. We would love to see



Ballard, who formerly worked at Sister's, Papa Tom's and White Birch Kitchen & Juice Bar in Abingdon, said he finds working at the community center a rewarding way to give back.

more families come to our programs. We want to bring more people together as a community," said Kayton.

Thinking like a chef

Andy Ballard, who was hired as a chef at the community center last October, understands the importance of partnerships.

When Ballard first arrived, he noticed the center was spending large amounts of money on prepackaged and premade foods that were basically at retail cost for the Meals on Wheels program.

"That left us with a monthly food bill of \$5,000 to \$6,000, which is ridiculous for a program that doesn't charge its clients," he said.

"We have always made fresh meals, but the quality was suffering because of the large expenses incurred, such as too many beans-and-weenies meals when funds got low," said Daniels.

As a former employee at Feeding America, the chef knew there was a better solution.

Ballard wanted to offer better quality to the 250 clients who receive the meals twice each week.

Ballard made arrangements to receive discounted fresh produce and some frozen meats from Feeding America Southwest Virginia.

"Meals on Wheels really is a community effort. Some of the food from Feeding America comes from places like Walmart and Sam's Club. We also receive discounted — and some free — foods from Kroger each week. Food City is also great to provide discounts on foods," said the chef.

"Feeding America often receives food from stores that has been overordered. It's not old, they just get too much of it," explained Ballard. "Instead of the business throwing it out, they help out their community by donating the food, plus they get a tax break at the end of the year."

If You Go

- » **Karaoke:** Every other Monday at 7 p.m.
- » **Live music:** Every Tuesday at 6 p.m.
- » **Bingo:** Every Wednesday at 6 p.m.
- » **Ballroom dancing:** Every Wednesday at 7 p.m.
- » **Line dancing:** Every Thursday at 11 a.m.
- » **Special event:** Valentine's Date Night from 5:30 to 11 p.m. on Feb. 14. Three-course meal served at 5:30 pm. with music group Tailgate 107 performing at 7 p.m. and Quarter Bounce performing from 8 to 11 p.m.

"It's unreal how many local businesses go out of their way to find food for these programs. They really go above and beyond."

"Now, I'm able to get the items I need to prepare homemade meals from scratch," said Ballard, who has sharpened his kitchen skills by working for some of Abingdon's best restaurants, including Sister's American Grill at the Martha Washington Inn, Papa Tom's Cajun Persuasion and White Birch Kitchen & Juice Bar.

The partnerships don't end there. Bettie Morrison of Abingdon is one of several volunteers who helps package the meals each week. "I'm just amazed at how well this program is run," she said.

Each week, senior citizens tie on their aprons and help chop fresh onions, peppers, carrots and celery, all of which are used in meals or frozen for later use.

"We're preparing great food and offering larger portions, too," said Ballard.

"I'm really excited about getting the word out about our program here because I think a lot of folks don't know that it exists. And it's a great opportunity to volunteer."

In addition to preparing food for Meals on Wheels, Ballard also makes fine dining meals for special occasions at the community center.

The chef will prepare a three-course meal with wine for Valentine's Date Night from 5:30 to 11 p.m. on Feb. 14. Food will be served at 5:30 pm., and the music group Tailgate 107 will perform at 7 p.m., followed by Quarter Bounce from 8 to 11 p.m.

Ballard said he's found his niche working as a chef at the community center. "I get to cook great meals — that's my first love. Instead of working in a restaurant with so many late nights, now I'm working with so many good people and volunteers."

"If you go around helping folks and you can't do it with a smile on your face, there's something wrong."

"There are a lot of smiles around this place."



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Making the most of the Moonlite

ABINGDON, Va. — I checked in with Katy Brown recently.

And she was bragging about the Barter Theatre moonlighting at the Moonlite Drive-In.

That's where you'll find productions of "The Wizard of Oz" on stage and screen, Tuesdays through Sundays, said Brown, 44, the Barter's producing artistic director.

It's like watching a movie and musical at the same time.

And it's definitely needed, Brown said.

Shows cannot be staged in town at the Barter's two stages, due to coronavirus concerns.

And now, as July blurs into August, that equates to a ticket sales loss of about \$2 million since March, according to Brown.

Fortunately, there's a bit of an intermission in the dire financial constraints of the Barter Theatre.

Fundraising efforts have offset some losses, so that it really only amounts to \$1.2 million.

Yeah, only.

Brown knows she's challenged. Barter Theatre entered this season with a financial dent from last year's slump in ticket sales.

Fortunately, though, the shows at the Moonlite have been well received, according to Brown, and they are attracting folks who are not regular Barter Theatre attendees.

"We've had several people come back more than once," Brown said.

"During the first week, the weekend, we had a pretty full house out there," Brown added. "It holds 220 cars. We were really pleased with this week, and our ticket sales went up for the next week."

Brown wants to see shows staged at the Moonlite, near I-81's Exit 13, until at least October.

And then?

Who knows?

"It sounds a little bit strange, but it's really magical," Brown said. "It's fireflies and stars, and you can be out there enjoying other people but nowhere close to them. And it's really exciting — we feel really excited about our safety protocols."

There's even been some talk about coming back next summer — coronavirus or not.

"We still are working on what we hope the rest of the year is looking at," Brown said. "We have to keep an eye on the virus. We have to keep an eye on all things safety on whether we can open the theater."



Terrance Jackson, Libby Zabitt, Michael Vine and Tyler Cramer play the Cowardly Lion, Dorothy, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man in Barter Theatre's "The Wizard of Oz" playing at the Moonlite Drive-In.



Joe Tennis

CERTIFIED NATURALLY GROWN



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS
Erin and Jonny Root along with Dylan House look over the garden at Creative Seeds Farm in Glade Spring, VA.

Putting down roots

Program allows farmers to share knowledge for organic growth

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

GLADE SPRING, Va. — Three local farms have become the first Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) farms in Washington County — and likely in most of Southwest Virginia.

Creative Seeds Farm in Glade Spring and Harvest Table Farm and Wolf Farm, both in Meadowview, participate in the CNG certification program and are committed to producing food without synthetic chemicals and promoting a holistic approach to harmony with nature.

The local farmers said they were drawn to the grassroots, nonprofit program because it allows them to exchange ideas with other CNG farmers and build valuable connections during peer review inspections.

They invite other farmers in the area to learn about the benefits of joining the more than 750 farmers and beekeepers in the United States and Canada who are Certified Naturally Grown.

Jonny and Erin Root, who manage Harvest Table Farm, met with Dylan and Denita House at their Creative Seeds Farm last week for a routine annual inspection of the Glade Spring farm and to network with and get feedback from each other.

Creative Seeds Farm produces 100 pounds of lettuce a month from March to July on a one-fourth acre of land.

"We're building a community of likeminded farmers who share the same values and ideas," said Dylan. "This gives us a connection because, honestly, farming can be a very lonely profession."

"When I got started farming over 10 years ago, there wasn't much information online. It was just trying to figure it out on my own."

Dylan said the CNG program is allowing him to use that experience to give back to farmers new to the region.

"Part of the beauty of the peer inspections is Dylan and I hold ourselves to certain standards, and we're going to hold other CNG farmers to those same standards," said his wife Denita.

"We're learning a lot from this couple," said Jonny who became a CNG participant after moving from Alaska to Southwest Virginia in February. "Dylan did our first inspection for us. Now we're fulfilling our end of the deal and inspecting his farm."

The House couple sees this as an opportunity to share new practices



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Dylan House, owner of Creative Seeds Farm in Glade Spring, demonstrates using a broadfork, a tool that manually breaks up soil and improves aeration. Unlike a garden tiller, a broadfork loosens the ground without disturbing the soil layers.

and foster local networks.

"The Roots are new to this climate, and I've been here for 17 years, so I can give them some pointers and things to look out for," said Dylan. "Lettuce, for example, needs shade cloth and overhead irrigation. That's the only way we can do it here. Instead of spraying for insects, we do row covers. It's a physical barrier to keep them out," he said pointing to rows of young lettuce.

Before planting, Dylan applies compost and alfalfa meal, organic fertilizers that are sold by Steve and Becky Wolf at their business, Wolf Farm Natural Elements.

Jonny and Erin said they became CNG certified because they believe in the organization's mission.

"CNG is not funded by larger corporations. It's based on us farmers being honest and pro-active with each other," said Jonny.

The local farmers believe the CNG program offers greater benefits than becoming a certified organic grower, which has paperwork and fees that may not be worth the headache.

"It's cost-prohibitive to be USDA-

certified organic," said Dylan.

"But it cost very little to be a [CNG]. The fee is around \$150 per year, and the organization has a fund available for any farmer who is not able to pay that."

Erin, who helps her partner raise produce for the Harvest Table Restaurant, believes the role of CNG is to help strengthen the farming community.

"CNG is putting power back in the hands of the people," she said. "We hold ourselves accountable. We don't need someone over us to tell us how to do it. We rely on the help from other CNG farmers."

"One of my biggest understandings of climate change, currently as it stands, is the loss of soil and the loss of soil health," said Erin. "I see CNG being focused on soil health and building good healthy soil."

"CNG is restoring the Earth by growing good soil. It's all about the soil."

Like the Roots, Dylan is a firm believer in soil preparation at his farm.

"I tell people I'm growing soil here, and everything else comes from that," he said, smiling.

For the most part, the farmer has eliminated tilling the soil each year.

"Every time you till, the microbiology in the soil is being smashed to pieces. It's like you're bringing in a tornado every time you disrupt the soil. There are seed banks of weeds that sit dormant below the ground. When you till, you give them the opportunity to come to the top."

Instead, Dylan relies on a broadfork, a tool used to manually break up the soil and improve aeration.

He also uses a wire weeder consisting of thin wire that pulls the roots of small weeds on the top layer of soil, causing fewer disturbances to the growing space.

"The recent innovation of tools has been amazing," said Dylan, as he demonstrated the tools in his garden. "As a result, farmers are finding the best methods for growing food and sharing those practices."

"It's like moving out of the age of competition and moving to an age of collaboration and spreading the knowledge."

To learn more about becoming a Certified Naturally Grown farmer, visit the website at www.cngfarming.org. Dylan and Denita House can be contacted at creativeseeds426@gmail.com.

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



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The Martha Washington Inn's owner ain't afraid of no ghosts

ABINGDON, Va. — Time was, you could hear all kinds of ghostly tales about the Martha Washington Inn.

Consider the ghostly girl named Beth who plays the violin, or the bloodstains that would never go away.

But don't go asking all that stuff to Ian Lloyd-Jones.



Joe Tennis

At 73, this Atlanta resident is the owner of the mighty Martha Washington Inn, the most looming landmark in Abingdon — with or without ghosts.

First question: What is the unknown ghost at the hotel?

"I haven't a clue," Lloyd-Jones told me.

"I mean, you always hear about Beth," I said. "You hear about the bloodstains."

Again, he said, "I haven't a clue"

I kept going: "Do you guys downgrade that?" I said.

Lloyd-Jones looked at me, rather matter-of-fact, and said, "I personally have no interest in it."

I nodded.

"Being the owner, I don't encourage stories about it," he said. "We have enough to do managing the inn as a place of hospitality. So we don't go there."

Even so, Lloyd-Jones does go here to "The Martha."

In fact, he says he's here "as often as necessary."

That could be twice a month.

Over nearly 25 years of owning the property, Lloyd-jones has learned that the citizens of Abingdon like to know the landmark as the Martha Washington Inn — and, really, nothing else.

"We quickly learned our lesson back in '96," he said.

It was briefly known as Camberly's Martha Washington.

Then it became Abingdon's Martha Washington.

The word "inn" was dropped.

"We went from inn to hotel and then back to inn."

Then it became "The Martha" because "so many people locally affectionately" call it that, Lloyd-Jones said.

"And then we got accused of dropping Washington!" he said. "We haven't dropped Washington. We just answer the phone, 'The Martha.'"



JOE TENNIS/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Owner of the Martha Washington Inn Ian Lloyd-Jones has little interest in the inn's alleged ghost stories, but he has learned the benefit of keeping its well-loved name.

FILMING 'FOUND'



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Benjamin Dawson (left) positions a camera on the set of "Found." The film from director David Alford is currently filming in Abingdon.

'Story worth telling'

Abingdon native talks about camera work and composing

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — It's after 8 on a balmy August morning on the set of the film "Found."

Benjamin Dawson prepares for another 12- to 16-hour workday as the first assistant camera guy, putting together tripods, moving equipment and running the film slate, a filmmaking tool used to document what scene is being filmed.

First thing, Dawson and other crew members unpack film gear — 12 boxes of camera equipment, lighting, audio and set designs.

It's a day in the life of the Abingdon film set.

"Scene 52, take five," said Dawson, as he closed the slate with a loud clap, grabbing the attention of the 10 actors on the set that morning.

At just 28, Dawson is making a name for himself in the film industry.

The Abingdon native recently returned from Athens, Georgia, to join local resident David Alford's faith-based film, "Found." — not only as a crew member but as a composer for the film's soundtrack.

The film is being shot in the Abingdon area through Aug. 13.

Once completed, the 90-minute film will be submitted to the Film Festival Circuit, allowing it to reach locations throughout the country and internationally — exposure that Dawson hopes will bring him more opportunities to compose music.

His work on "Found." represents the 27th project for which he has written music, including the film "Cross Purposes," also produced by Alford in 2019. He has scored — or written original music — for projects ranging from commercials and television shows to short films.

Dawson will compose the music in October, after the film goes to editors for assembly of scenes and while the color and sound mixing is underway.

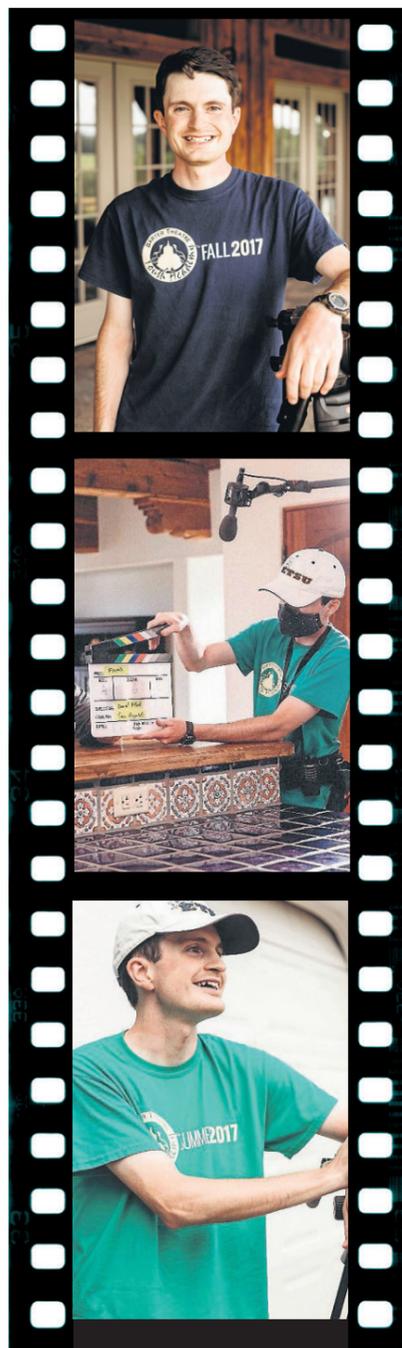
"The main structure of the music composition will be similar to an Appalachian fiddler tune to reflect the traditional lifestyle of Finch," said Dawson. "Family scenes will be of a symphonic nature. For the villain in the story, I may break out electric guitars to give him a cool look."

A composer, theorist and violinist, Dawson said accompanying music for films always helps to dictate the emotions audience members will feel.

He likes to think he is creating melodies that touch the soul.

"The art of music composition contains many aspects — melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, timbre and silence. I believe it's the role of the composer to engage, to comfort, to challenge and to inspire through music. My philosophy is that there can never be too many melodies in the world, and I love nothing more than to find a good tune and stick with it."

The story line of "Found." is about a teenage boy named Finch who has never been part of modern society. He has grown up completely off the grid in the Appalachian Mountains, away from the modern world. In the story, Finch finds himself dropped in the middle of modern world.



Playing it by ear

Dawson's opportunity with the Abingdon film is a far cry from the backyard home movie productions he and his sister Bethany put together as children.

There's little doubt where the Dawson siblings inherited their love of music. Their mother, Regina Dawson, is a former piano professor at Columbia Bible College and Southern Wesleyan University, both in South Carolina.

He started piano lessons at age 5 and the violin at age 9. His father, David Dawson, started learning the cello at age 40.

"Actually, I wanted to quit several times as a child, and I even dropped my instrument on the floor and cracked it. But we were able to fix it."

At age 8, he wrote his first piano piece, "Morning Mist."

A turning point in his music career was at age 11 when he won a scholarship from Bristol Music Club. "I had never won any awards before. That was cool."

He has never strayed from his passion for music.

After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree from Thomas Edison State University in New Jersey, Dawson received a master's degree in theory and composition from Appalachian State University. While at the university, he played violin in the Graduate String Quartet for two years.

Dawson is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition at the University of Georgia (UGA). As part of his duties there, he teaches music theory and has also taught aural skills.

His dissertation at UGA is the writing of a one-act bluegrass opera based on the book of Ruth in the Bible, set in West Virginia in the 1950s.

Dawson's accomplishments and awards are too numerous to list.

He was previously an adjunct professor at East Tennessee State University and King University, teaching theory and orchestration courses.

He has directed theater classes and music for Barter Youth Academy from 2012 to 2019. He also has directed elementary, middle and high school students in shows such as "The Music Man," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Lion King" and "The Importance of Being Earnest."

He has created more than 30 symphonic arrangements with Symphony of the Mountains.

Dawson serves as the board chair for Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy, a choral education program serving Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee.

He also plays violin at his church, Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Athens.

"I feel like my calling is teaching. I really like working with college students. Although I don't talk about my Christian faith or my worldview, I really try to demonstrate my love for the Lord in my everyday life."

"The story is very rich while still having a worldview that's important to share. It's pulling forth principles that God tells us to be living out," Dawson said.

Fellowship among actors

The first assistant cameraman described the work on the set as tiring but invigorating.

"We have to be ready to go with short hours of sleep. I think that's a good skill for life, too," Dawson said.

The fellowship among the actors is what makes the long days seem shorter, he said.

"We often shoot the film until 11 p.m. or even 2 a.m. because we have a lot of material packed into scenes. Two nights ago, I got four hours of sleep. You just approach it knowing this is a short-term squeeze, and it's a story worth telling — not to mention it's a great bunch of people to be around."

"I really enjoy the atmosphere of the set. I'm impressed with the preparedness of the actors, and the work ethic is great among crew members."

"The people in Abingdon are willing to share their properties for the filmmaking."

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