

# Watch Now: Local woman reunites with Mustang given to her on 16th birthday

Justin Faulconer

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Donna Henderson is back in the driver's seat of her first car, a 1973 Ford Mustang convertible her father bought her when she was 16.  
Justin Faulconer, The News & Advance

For her 16th birthday in 1973, Donna Henderson received a brand new, yellow Ford Mustang convertible from her father.

History repeated itself Feb. 28 on her 65th birthday when her older brother, Steve Martin, presented her with the fully restored vehicle at his Amherst body shop. She beamed with laughter as he handed her the keys.

The surprise was just as sweet for Henderson, who now resides on a Nelson County farm, as it was nearly 50 years ago.

Henderson said the gift was a pleasant shock and she had no idea she would be reunited with her first vehicle. She recalled daily trips to Amherst County High School, Central Virginia Community College and special trips to places such as the beach.

"I'm really excited about it," said Henderson. "I wasn't ready for that."

After the heartfelt moment at Martin's Paint & Body Shop in Amherst, Martin treated Henderson to lunch for her birthday.

Martin said his father bought the classic '73 Mustang at Amherst Motors and it still has the original motor. After some years, he ended up with the vehicle and owned it for decades.

He was thrilled to give it back and make Henderson's most recent birthday as sweet as her 16th.

The vehicle cost \$4,250 in 1973 and the air conditioning was an additional \$200 at the time, Martin said. It caught their father's eye on the lot.

"He just worked on them like I do," Martin said of his dad's knack for cars.

Henderson recalls her dad asking her if she wanted the vehicle when she was a junior in high school.

"I said, 'I'm not going to turn it down,'" she laughed.

The car also holds much sentimental value to Martin's wife, Jerry. He borrowed the car in 1976 for their first date.

"We've been married 43 years, and it's time for her to get it back," Jerry Martin said.

Jerry Martin drove the Mustang for many years to Virginia Baptist Hospital where she worked, and it's been showcased through the years in local parades and car shows.

"It's been well worn," Jerry Martin said. "It's made a lot of people happy."

# Ten years after forming, Second Stage stays true to mission of bringing Amherst together

Justin Faulconer

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Second Stage | Amherst is now a national and Virginia historic landmark.  
Lee Luther Jr. photos, for the New Era-Progress

A decade after forming to transform a former Amherst house of worship into a community hotspot and cultural center, Second Stage | Amherst is reflecting on past successes and looking ahead to new opportunities.

The nonprofit formed in 2012 as a grassroots effort to find new life for the old Amherst Baptist Church site at 194 Second St. in Amherst after the building closed and the congregation moved to another facility. In spring 2015, the venue, which at one time Amherst County officials discussed possibly demolishing, began its lease with the county and last year achieved a milestone of becoming a national historic landmark.

In a recent annual report to the Amherst County Board of Supervisors, Suny Monk, the nonprofit's president, addressed the COVID-19 pandemic's many effects on its programming and activities.

"I doubt that any of us last year at this time would thought we would still be juggling the way we work and live together but that's what we at Second Stage are continuing to do," in reducing or postponing events and gatherings. "It does feel like we are seeing a break on the horizon."

Monk said the venue's studio tenants are filled with a waiting list and a variety of services, from Yoga to accounting, are offered. The site is also turning into a sort of wellness center with three types of various counseling available, she said.

The organization plans to reopen its in-person farmers market in May, the ninth season, she said.

Accomplishments in 2021 include fully funded food assistance programs, hosting events outdoors and virtually, among them adult and children's online workshops and drive-in movies, planting a garden and constructing a patio near the front entrance, investing just more than \$15,700 in capital improvements and providing resident artists for Amherst County Public Schools summer programs.

This year's initiatives include safety lighting and sidewalk enhancements, expanded offerings for tenants such as parenting classes, art therapy and counseling, and partnering with local Virginia Cooperation Extension office for educational and instructional programming, including cooking demonstrations, canning classes and food safety instruction.

Monk said Second Stage was hopeful in the past year to launch a day care service through partnering with a Lynchburg organization but not enough staff members were on board to make it happen.

"I'm sad about that because I know we have a need," Monk said. "The highest priority is affordable day care ... we've got a stumbling block there."

Brittani Gowen, who recently was hired as executive director, said Second Stage is offering affordable music lessons in the evenings for piano, voice and violin and is starting another virtual art series in mid-March. Another initiative is striving to become a destination and affordable alternative for private group gatherings such as weddings, receptions and birthday parties.

Supervisor Claudia Tucker said whenever she drives down Second Street and sees the venue bustling with activity, the sight makes her heart sing.

"This has been a labor of love for me. I remember when we thought the bulldozer was going to be sitting there and we fought through that," Tucker told Monk. "What you and your board and the volunteers have done is nothing short of spectacular."

# Watch Now: Amherst Woman's Club celebrates 50-year milestone

Justin Faulconer

May 11, 2022



The Amherst Woman's Club celebrates 50 years during a plaque presentation at the Amherst Visitor Center on May 4, 2022. Justin Faulconer, the New Era-Progress

A plaque marking the 50 years of the Amherst Woman's Club was celebrated May 4 at the Amherst historic train depot, a fitting spot for a group constantly on the go in its philanthropic efforts.

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce, which is housed in the depot that also serves as the Amherst visitor center, hosted the club for a brief presentation recognizing its milestone.

Jill Clarke, serving in her last meeting as president during her two-year term, spoke of the abundant volunteer work the nonprofit group does and contributions to the Amherst County community.

"Our fundraising is insurmountable," Clark said.

Ellen Pettyjohn, a club member of 11 years and a past president, said the nonprofit is dedicated to the welfare of Amherst County residents and people at risk. The group is active in prevention efforts in areas of domestic violence and child abuse, she said, and it also supported the Patrick Henry Girls and Boys Home in Brookneal.

"We help numerous organizations on a yearly basis," said Pettyjohn. "We give two scholarships to high school seniors, we give dictionaries to Amherst County elementary students and we have a writing contest where a certificate is given to junior high students."

The club is open to women of all ages, she said.

"We have fun, we raise funds and are just very philanthropic and concerned about the citizens of Amherst County," Pettyjohn said.

Gloria Stiltner, the club's program chair, has been involved in the Amherst Woman's Club for 8 years.

"It's a fabulous, wonderful group," Stiltner said.

Club members past and present, as well as prospective ones and special guests, recently gathered at Sweet Briar College to mark the 50th anniversary of the club's charter. Since April 11, 1972, the club of nearly 70 members has adhered to objectives that promote cultural, educational and environmental welfare of the community through volunteer service.

For an April 20 garden luncheon and general meeting, ladies were escorted to the door by several formally attired men and club members wore vintage attire, hats and gloves to mark the special occasion. All who attended and honorary members and past presidents Gina Fell and Elvira Morse were gifted a gold AWC rose pin. Attendees also received gold anniversary bags with club history, program, newsletter and recipe cards to commemorate the day.

The April 20 meeting included photo albums and scrapbooks and special guests, General Federation of Women's Clubs Virginia President-elect Bonnie Rosemond and Alice Kyle District President Carol Pridgen, presented the club with anniversary certificates.

Membership Chair Cat Brandell recently presented Susan Mays, a 50-year member of the Amherst Woman's Club, with a GFWC 50-year membership pin, cards, certificates and an engraved Jefferson Loving Cup.

A fashion show featuring clothes from all five decades of service completed the club's anniversary program.