



BY JULIA SHANAHAN

During the dance of universal peace, women link arms around the fire pit. The dance was lead by Lisa Powers, an expert in agnihotra and homa therapy.

Gathering of the tribe: Rappahannock's Red Tent Sisterhood

BY JULIA SHANAHAN
Rappahannock News staff

Years of monthly potluck dinners among women in Rappahannock County became a safe place for women of all ages to take refuge and connect with themselves and their sisterhood.

The Rappahannock Red Tent held its 2nd annual gathering of the tribe on Saturday, the Vernal Equinox, to provide a forum for women and celebrate healing and regenerative arts. At the heart of a

*On the Vernal Equinox,
women gather in
Castleton to find
strength and support
in each other*

for a similar purpose — to honor the journey of womanhood.

gathering is a tent where women have unfiltered conversations about their bodies, hardships and other shared experiences.

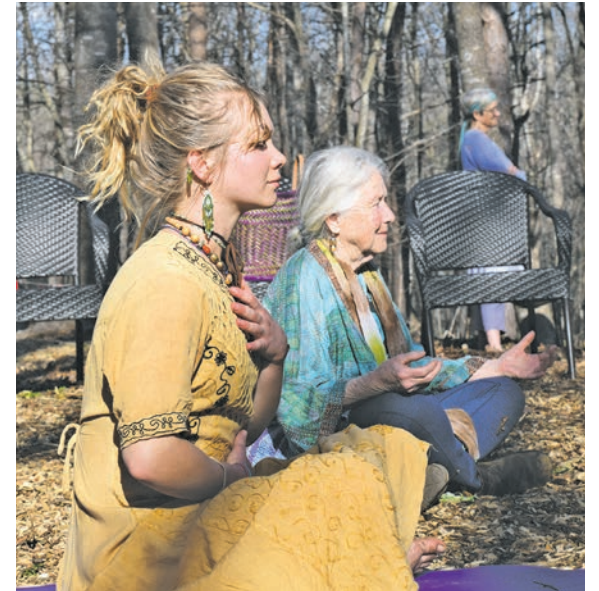
Rappahannock is part of a global network called “Red Tents in Every Neighborhood” where groups of women meet

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Cathy Kiley Martin leads the opening ceremony for the Rappahannock Red Tent Sisterhood event. Martin, a student of indigenous culture, performed songs from the Lakota and Cherokee tribes.

Molly Swartwout, 23, participates in yoga and meditation. Swartwout was formerly a student at the Green Comfort School of Herbal Medicine.



PHOTOS BY JULIA SHANAHAN

RED TENT

From Page 1

“It’s just [about] reclaiming our power and our independence and a support network for each other, because we get busy,” said Cheryl Crews, founder of the Living Sky Foundation and Rappahannock Red Tent facilitator. “The whole thing about communities, it’s only as strong as your members. And so we established Red Tent in Rappahannock to strengthen our community again.”

The mission stated in their event pamphlet is for the Rappahannock Red Tent Sisterhood “to provide a safe, private forum where women are always welcome, nurtured, respected, and honored and to connect with the feminine community of our home in the foothills of the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of Rappahannock County.”

The Saturday event was hosted at Teresa Boardwine’s Green Comfort School of Herbal Medicine in Castleton. Women spanning the ages of premenstrual to matriarch participated together in Red Tent conversations, a vegetarian potluck, and various forms of healing arts like dances of universal peace, yoga and meditation and a celestial wisdom workshop.

The global network was created by author and Mentor of Menstrual Empowerment DeAnna L’am with the goal of “making menstruation & menopause visible and reclaiming them as Spiritual Journeys,” according to her website.

“The dominant culture will say, ‘oh thats woo woo,’” said Cathy Kiley Martin, a healer in the Wise Woman Tradition and student of indigenous culture. “No, it’s ancient.”

Martin opened the Red Tent event with songs from the Lakota and Cherokee tribes, saying indigenous culture appreciates and honors Mother Earth. Martin moved to Rappahannock County in 1986 and found that her spiritual beliefs aligned with

indigenous culture, and she has studied alongside members of the indigenous community since.

“Those songs are very special — ancient spiritual songs,” Martin said. “So I was singing them to open the ceremony and of course bring in the Earth, the air, the fire, the water, Father sky above and Mother Earth below. And of course, the great mystery that is creator, that is the creator of all. So that’s where I’m coming from, and I’m on a path of sharing that with people.”

Molly Swartwout, 23, attended the Saturday event and said she found the

bodies existing exactly as they are, is really transformative and revolutionary, in my opinion.”

Swartwout initially came to Rappahannock County a couple of years ago to work on a flower farm and then stayed to take Boardwine’s course on herbal medicine at the Green Comfort School, where the Red Tent event was held last week.

She said she hopes to see the language for Red Tent organizations begin to include women who are transgender, saying it’s not always inherent that a woman is going to

“The whole thing about communities, it’s only as strong as your members. And so we established Red Tent in Rappahannock to strengthen our community again.”

Tent event, saying she’s always admired this group of women who are unapologetically spiritual and in touch with “hippy” culture.

Growing up, Hughes felt misunderstood by her family and felt like she couldn’t have conversations about spirituality. Hughes said she left Saturday’s event feeling like she finally came into her true self at age 59.

“I was always fascinated with astrology and numerology and the moon phases and just stuff that was different from the rest of my family and friends in general, and so... a lot of us will suppress ourselves to fit in,” Hughes said. “Now you fast forward, of course, I’ve had a lot of life changes. But here I am, 59, And I’m finally at a place where I’m becoming more comfortable with that part of me ... And so to be there with those women that I admire and who inspire me ... it was life altering.”

Hughes participated in a Red Tent discussion with women who were either mothers or identified as matriarchs. She said her mother recently passed away, and now that she’s one of the eldest women in her family, she’s had to assume that matriarch role.

“I was able to have those discussions in the tent and found that other women were walking similar paths,” she said. “Maybe the specifics were not the same, but it was incredibly helpful and the timing was perfect... just being in that red tent is a magical feeling.”



Hannah Rosenbaum leads a Red Tent conversation with younger women at the gathering.

Red Tent organization on Facebook as a younger woman and liked how the group made talking about things like menstruation and menopause not only normal, but celebrated.

“I think there’s a dominant narrative for menstruation being something to suppress or to be embarrassed about or an inconvenience, and the same thing goes with hormones in general and just having a uterus or aging,” Swartwout said. “And so having a space where the entire purpose is honesty, and nuance and celebration of differences and of

have a uterus.

“Unfortunately, I think that the Red Tent got created in a time where language about trans rights and just trans people in general didn’t really have a lot of visibility,” Swartwout said. “Red Tent to me is about celebrating cycles and celebrating your body as it is, however it is, and I think that actually translates really well to trans people and to gender inclusivity.”

‘YOU’RE NEVER TOO OLD’

Rhonda Foster Hughes, 59, was a little nervous to attend the Red

Connecting people to plants



BY JULIA SHANAHAN

Teresa Boardwine teaches a class at the Green Comfort School of Herbal Medicine while foraging for herbs. Boardwine's Castleton school has become a mecca for herbalism on the east coast.

▶ ***A reporter's personal perspective: How Boardwine helped me immensely through my own health journey upon moving to Rappahannock County about a year ago. See Page 12***

{ *Perspective* }

How Rappahannock became an east coast mecca for herbalism

BY JULIA SHANAHAN
Rappahannock News staff

Herbalist and teacher Teresa Boardwine described Rappahannock County as “a place that attracts those who are seeking.” She said maybe there’s a frequency or magnetism in the air that draws people in, or maybe it’s the Blue Ridge Mountains and beautiful landscape.

I came to Rappahannock County in the middle of a complicated health journey with chronic pain and an undiagnosed autoimmune disease. For eight years I had never received any real answers or solutions from doctors and at times have felt helpless to pain that controls my everyday life.

I first met Boardwine while reporting on an event that took place at her Green Comfort School of Herbal Medicine in Castleton. That was my introduction to the world of herbal medicine, and feeling like I was running out of options, I thought it wouldn’t hurt to give herbalism a try.

After a three-hour long consultation with Boardwine and her students, which they provide free of charge, during one of their clinical classes, I had the most productive conversation I’ve ever had about my health. Boardwine said “divine intervention” helped me find the Green Comfort School, and I left with tea, a tincture (both of which I purchased) and a newfound hope that I would get a handle on my health and chronic pain.

For almost two months, I’ve been taking herbs prescribed to me by Boardwine to help treat a condition called Interstitial Cystitis, also known as Painful Bladder Syndrome, which I was diagnosed with by a urologist a couple of weeks after my appointment with Boardwine. This condition causes chronic inflammation in the bladder and a host of other symptoms like chronic fatigue and stomach pains.

Boardwine’s holistic care alongside regular visits to a medical specialist have been pivotal in my healing process, and I’m now able to control the pain that used to make me feel helpless.

While everyone’s story and health journey is different, herbs have played a critical role in mine. Herbalism is often referred to as alternative medicine, but Boardwine said she likes to call it “complementary medicine” because it’s best used in conjunction with care from a medical doctor.

Boardwine is certified by the American Herbalist Guild, one of the few herbal schools along the east coast that is certified by a professional organization. In order to be certified by the AHG, an individual must have 800 hours of foundational herbal education and 4,400 hours of clinical work with medicinal herbs. The foundational education includes an overview of 200 plant medicines and what they’re used for, plant chemistry and the pathophysiology of the human body.

Boardwine receives weekly correspondence from the American Botanical Council and a resource called PubMed, which is run by the National Institute of Health. These organizations, considered to be some of the top organizations in the nation for research on herbalism, send newsletters with up-to-date information on medicinal herbs.

“I do think there’s enough literature, there’s enough science, there’s enough history of use [of herbs] on the planet,” Boardwine said. “Seriously, the books date back some plants over 2,000 years

... There’s just so many places around the globe that we’ve learned about the use of [herbs], and then the documentation came when the science caught up and said, ‘Oh, yeah, that’s why that works that way.’”

During a clinical consultation at Green Comfort School, which is what I participated in, a person sits down with Boardwine and her class of advanced-level students where they go through each system of the human body, talking about any and all health conditions and injuries a person may have had to that system. Some seek care from Boardwine for specific health concerns, like me, while others go in an attempt to improve their wellness.

take classes at the Green Comfort School, some like Tonya Marino, who drives four hours from New Jersey once a month to take classes from Boardwine. “There’s not a lot of classes on the east coast... none quite like this,” Marino said.

“Being in this part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the bio region is rich with plants and it’s very unique, so we have some of the oldest, well-known plant remedies in our woods,” Boardwine said.

Classes on herbal medicine can be found online, but many people from this region choose to drive to Rappahannock to take in-person classes. Boardwine said that’s something she tries to emphasize in her



Flossie Williamson, left, seen in a photo kept on Cheri Woodard’s desk.

PHOTOS BY JULIA SHANAHAN



After the initial two-hour long intake, the class brainstorms dozens of herbs that can be used to treat various ailments and conditions. This looks like a web of words and arrows on

a white board and a group of women with noses buried in a spread of textbooks, all dedicated to finding a solution that will be best suited for that individual’s body.

Clinical consultations are free of charge and clients are only required to pay for any herbs or tinctures they may be prescribed, if they choose to take that route. Boardwine will begin taking clients for clinical consultations again in September. People can also schedule private appointments with Boardwine for a charge.

Students travel from all over the east coast to

education: the hands-on experience of foraging for herbs and roots and making the teas and tinctures together as a class.

“That’s one of my greatest gifts, is connecting people to plants, and I just feel like once you see a plant, touch a plant, taste a plant, see where it grows in the wild, you just have so much more information than you would from reading,” Boardwine said.

Margaret Fagan drives about two hours from Bethesda, Maryland once a month for class, at first because she wanted the in-person experience of herbal school. Now she makes the commute because she wants to continue her education with Boardwine.

“I love being able to help people, and it’s so accessible,” Fagan said of herbs. “And there’s that trust issue, though. [Herbalism] is so ancient, and it’s also so foreign. So, some people are really into it, and others are really rigid, which is fine. I’m really in just a learning phase right now, but that’s my drive.”

After this year, Boardwine will retire her nine-month course and focus on her advanced students and clinical classes.

“My classes and my students, that’s what gives me joy, otherwise I’d be really bored with



➔ myself out here,” Boardwine said. “So saying that I’m not going to do my nine-month curriculum doesn’t mean I’m not going to be an herbalist or offer things, but I think it will be much more informal.”

Roots in Rappahannock

Boardwine was living in Europe in her early twenties while her first husband was deployed with the U.S. Air Force. She was at a bookstore in Italy in 1982 when she picked up a magazine about herbalism, and in the classified section, she saw an advertisement for Faith Mountain Herbs and Antiques in Sperryville, Virginia.

While Boardwine is a native Virginian, she had never been to Rappahannock County. But that magazine, which she said “became her bible” while living abroad, eventually brought her to Rappahannock to start her business in 1994 after she finished herbal school in California.

“That’s how Teresa met me, through mail order, because ... she was living in Europe and she found my catalog, which is pretty amazing,” said Cheri Woodard, who previously owned Faith Mountain Herbs and Antiques and now works in Rappahannock as a realtor. “I don’t know how she [found me], I never heard a story like that ... it’s like a fairy tale.”

Woodard apprenticed alongside self-taught Rappahannock-based herbalist Flossie Williamson, who has since passed, from 1974 to 1977 when Woodard was 26 years old and new to the county.



BY JULIA SHANAHAN

Teresa Boardwine:

“Being in this part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the bio region is rich with plants and it’s very unique, so we have some of the oldest, well-known plant remedies in our woods.”

Woodard said she’s always had an entrepreneurial spirit and was inspired to start her own shop called Faith Mountain Herbs and Antiques, but eventually phased out the herb side of her business. But, she said herbalism has always been a passion and Williamson became a good friend. Woodard still keeps a photo of Williamson in her office.

In a cookbook put together by Woodard and others who knew Williamson called “Flossie’s Recipes,” Woodard wrote, “Days spent with Flossie were like a dream — a returning to another era — and I indeed feel fortunate for our time together ... her basic contention that ‘fresh herbs make a difference’ was drilled into me

from the first day.”

Herbalism has a long history in Rappahannock County. Woodard helped Boardwine develop the business side of the Green Comfort School, and Boardwine has educated herbalists who now have their own businesses in the county.

Cara Cutro, owner of Abracadabra Massage and Wellness, and Colleen O’Bryant, owner of Wild Roots

Apothecary, both apprenticed alongside Boardwine and now run their own businesses in Sperryville.

“There’s a lot of freedom to safely explore and practice herbalism under that umbrella of education...” Cutro said. “So professionally, as an herbalist seeing clients — that’s another thing that if you’re a student of Teresa’s you get a great deal of exposure to once you reach the clinical phase of your training.”

Cutro worked with Boardwine in 2011 and 2012 after seeing her for chronic eczema and skin conditions. Cutro was also struggling with drug and alcohol addiction and said herbs helped her a great deal in recovery, especially in healing her digestive and nervous systems.

“And then spiritually and emotionally, I was in a supportive and safe environment, so that was really beautiful,” Cutro said. “I had become close with Teresa. She was a really useful healing artist in my life at that time, and a teacher and a friend ... It gave me something to do, because I think a lot of times when people are newly sober or newly getting clean ... if you have something to focus on that’s good for you and that you enjoy, that can be very helpful. So it gave me a purpose.”

Cider and dulcimers come to Estes Mill

Owner's collection of the obscure Appalachian instrument to be placed on display for cider house guests

BY JULIA SHANAHAN
Rappahannock News staff

A historical sawmill in Sperryville will soon become a destination where residents and tourists can drink locally-brewed cider and learn about a little-known Appalachian

instrument, the dulcimer.

Rappahannock resident John Hallberg purchased Estes Mill four years ago with the intention of renovating the sawmill building, while still preserving its historical integrity, to house a nonprofit dulcimer museum to feature his own expansive collection of one of the world's oldest instruments.

Hallberg with one of his dulimers.

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BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

ESTES MILL

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Now, as Hallberg is about two months away from opening, he's found a way to fuse his two hobbies, cider making and dulcimers, into a one-stop shop for cider and musical history.

"I had originally planned to have the museum as the main part of the kind of thrust of what I wanted to do here," Hallberg said. "And then it was like, okay, knowing that I know how to make cider and have made cider professionally, that would be the thing that would actually help bring people in here, get some revenue, and help, actually, with the exposure to the dulcimer."

Estes Mill, located at 9 Josh Ben Ln., was built in the early 1800s as one of the county's more popular saw mills, and the Estes family purchased the property in 1900 and built a family home next to the mill. While the old gear wheels have been donated to the Smithsonian Institution, the building still stands along the Thornton River.

Hallberg added a small addition to the old mill building to house the dulcimer museum and additional rooms to brew and store cider. When guests enter the building through the front doors, they will first walk into a tasting room with a small bar and cider on tap, along with occasional live music.

For the last several months, Hallberg has been processing apples with his old-school equipment, like a hydraulic press, to prepare an array of alcoholic ciders for the business' opening. Hallberg said he worked at a handful of beer breweries across Ohio and Washington D.C. in the 1980's and 90's, and began making cider in the early 90's after moving to Rappahannock County.

The main activity at Estes Mill will be cider making, he said, and experiencing the dulcimer museum will be free for guests with a suggested donation.

"The dulcimer is such a low profile instrument, both in terms of its sound, but also in terms of its visibility, that any one person living in the state where it evolved may or may not even know of its existence," he said.

What is a dulcimer?

A dulcimer is a fretted string instrument, typically with three or four strings, and originates in the Appalachian region. The sound is similar to a guitar or banjo, but unlike those more common instruments, a dulcimer has a diatonic fretboard and the strings are stretched over the soundboard, not isolated on a fingerboard.

Hallberg considers himself to be a dulcimer historian, having done research, collecting dulcimers of various backgrounds and keeping in touch with other dulcimer experts across the country. He said the purpose of the dulcimer is for anyone to be able to pick it up and play it.

"It's certainly an instrument that is looked at as an elementary instrument in the fact that anybody can pick it up and start playing it fairly →



Listen:

Hear one of the world's oldest instruments



Reporter Julia Shanahan talks with Estes Mill owner John Hallberg about his renovation of the historic Sperryville property.

► To hear an audio story, go to rappnews.com/dulcimer or point your smartphone camera at the QR code above and tap the link.

Left: John Hallberg with part of his collection: The scheitholt, a Germanic stringed instrument from about 1780, came with its original bow and box, which is rare.

Below: Hallberg's renovated Estes Mill is about two months away from reopening.

PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER



→ easily,” he said. “But it’s also this instrument that you can really take as far as you want ... there are some really technically proficient players that play all sorts of things on dulcimer.”

Hallberg’s collection features dulcimers from different parts of the Appalachian region, which he said can be identified by small details in the craftsmanship. He has been collecting the instrument for more than 20 years, and said he considers his collection to be one of the best in the world. Hallberg said his collection has received “infusions” from other notable collections, and there are very few people in the country who are dulcimer historians.

“Virginia is actually historically the state where the instrument developed, so, of course, you can imagine some of those old historic instruments never left the state,” Hallberg said. “We’re in the inception of them. So really, it’s just a question of shaking the trees and finding some of those very old instruments and documenting them.”

He said there is not a single correct

way to make or play dulcimer, partially because the instrument was never mass produced. There is also no clear record of when it was first invented or where exactly it first originated, but some research shows the instrument was developed 2,000 years ago in Iran where it was called the Santur. The origins of the Appalachian dulcimer, also referred to as the “mountain dulcimer,” are uncertain.

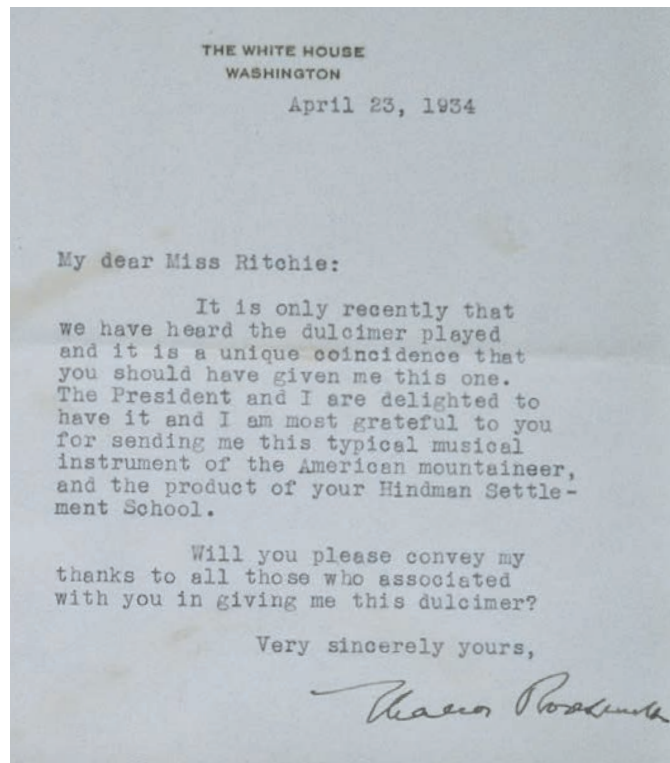
Hallberg said he first heard the dulcimer in his early 20’s while listening to records from his favorite bands, like the Rolling Stones and Fairport Convention, which featured the instrument in some of their songs. About 25 years ago Hallberg purchased his first dulcimer and learned how to play, and since then has been collecting and researching the instrument.

“It’s one of the first instruments in the country,” he said. “So, here’s one of the bottom lines — nothing was written down about the dulcimer. So you have just the oral history, and you just have the instruments left to study to tell you about the past.”

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PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER



A letter from Eleanor Roosevelt is part of the Estes Mill dulcimer museum collection.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Sperryville’s Estes Mill in 1933.

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