

# Eastern Shore Post

MAY 12, 2023

THE VOICE OF ACCOMACK AND NORTHAMPTON COUNTIES ON VIRGINIA'S EASTERN SHORE

FREE OF CHARGE



EASTERN SHORE POST/CLARA VAUGHN

Muralist Seth Lubaton stands in front of an unfinished replica of late artist Willie Crockett's painting on the upper story of 39 Market St., Crockett's former studio, on Monday, May 8.

## Willie Crockett mural bedazzles Onancock

BY CLARA VAUGHN

Eastern Shore Post

A tribute to late artist and Tangier native Willie Crockett is on display outside his former studio in Onancock.

The larger-than-life mural of Crockett's painting matches the celebrated artist and storyteller's personality.

"Everybody loved Willie," said Onancock Mayor Fletcher Fosque from the roof of Bizzotto's Gallery Caffe, the staging area for work on the project, Monday.

"This is Willie's town now," muralist Seth Lubaton said.

He began work on the roughly 12-by-24-foot seascape last week and said it pays homage to a celebrated Eastern Shore character.

(Continued on page 26)



# Mural

(Continued from page 1)

Crockett passed away in 2021 and was famed for his artistic talent, Tangier accent, and natural storytelling abilities.

The mural is one of three planned for downtown Onancock, thanks to a project by Onancock Main Street, a non-profit organization that works with the town to “ensure the continued vibrancy and preservation of historic downtown Onancock,” according to its website.

OMS is a Main Street America-Accredited program and a member of Virginia Main Street.

“We learned through Main Street ... that numerous small towns had done this and found that it helped increase their traffic — that people would come off the highway if there were numerous murals to see,” said OMS Mural Committee Chair and Board of Directors member Cindy Holdren.

“That was our goal: to help the historic part of Onancock and the businesses become more vibrant and active,” she said.

The mural concept took root several years ago and is funded by grants OMS pursued through Virginia Main Street, a Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development program, she said.

OMS selected Lubaton from among 14 applicants for its first mural on the rear wall of 9 North St., which shows a bright array of flowers, butterflies, and bees and is visible from the King Street parking lot.

The Virginia Beach artist had already designed and painted over 40 murals when he came to Onancock.

Lubaton’s second project in town is the replica of the Crockett painting on the upper story of 39 Market St., which was the artist’s studio for over 20 years.

“He was just a prolific artist and painted so much,” said Lubaton, who studied Crockett’s works that use both watercolor and oil paint to capture the movement of water featured in many of his paintings.

Crockett’s family helped choose the painting for the mural, said Holdren, who noted his son, Craig Crockett, still owns the property.

“All of the business owners... have



EASTERN SHORE POST/CLARA VAUGHN

Above, artist Seth Lubaton already completed a mural of bright flowers, butterflies, and bees on the rear wall of 9 North St., visible from the King Street parking lot, in downtown Onancock. Below, Lubaton sits on the roof of Bizzotto’s Gallery Caffe, where he spent the week painting a mural replica of late artist Willie Crockett’s painting at 39 Market St., Onancock.



been great,” she said of those who have provided space for the murals.

In addition to the Crockett family, Mary and Elon Benaknin, who own the Blarney Stone Pub, provided space for the mural at 9 North St.

The North Street Playhouse will provide space for a third mural centered

on the performing arts at its 34 Market St. location. Artist Curtis Goldstein, of Ohio, will begin work on that mural later this summer, Holdren said.

OMS has applied for additional grants that might lead to future murals downtown, she added.

Crockett’s wife, Iris Morgan Crockett,

said her husband began painting after they met an artist on the way to Washington state, where Crockett moved to be a preacher.

“He said, ‘Willie, come over to our apartment. Let me show you what I’m doing with watercolor,’” she said. “The next day he went and he got everything he needed to paint, and never stopped.”

Willie Crockett soon met a professional artist from Southern California, who trained him, leading to his famous style, she said.

She called the tribute to her late husband’s work “beautiful.”

“When I came in (to the studio) and looked up, all I could do was cry,” she said. “It’s so beautiful.”

Moments like that make his job rewarding, Lubaton said.

“It’s just been an awesome experience,” he said.

Visit [www.experienceonancock.com](http://www.experienceonancock.com) to learn more about Onancock Main Street and its initiatives in downtown Onancock.

Visit [www.lubatonmurals.com](http://www.lubatonmurals.com) to learn more about Lubaton’s work.



# ‘We’re accidental farmers’

## A \$3-a-pound self-pick blueberry business continues a tasty Hacksneck tradition

BY CLARA VAUGHN  
Eastern Shore Post

When Arlington residents Charles and Helene Danner bought property on Mason Beach Road, they were looking for a quiet spot on the water.

The Danners are now in their second year owning and running Mason Beach Farm, a pick-your-own blueberry business that became an Eastern Shore institution before closing its gates in 2017.

The farm is open for business, 8 a.m. to dusk, seven days a week.

“We’re accidental farmers,” said Helene Danner, a retired language teacher.

“We came here just with the intentions of retiring and enjoying the water,” said Charles Danner, who was a U.S. Air Force pilot.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Charles Danner could no longer cross the border to visit the couple’s home in Canada, where Helene Danner is a dual citizen.

That led them to Google Earth, where they found a farm tucked miles down the back roads of Hacksneck.

The Danners moved to the farm June 27, 2022, and reopened the pick-your-own blueberry business that July 6, a few days after the farm’s long-time caretaker visited.

“If it hadn’t been for Don, there wouldn’t be a blueberry farm,” Charles Danner said, referencing Don Fogle. “He convinced us that this would be something for the community to re-open.”

Three generations of locals have visited Mason Beach Farm, but the orchard dates back the 1960s, when Tom Byrne purchased the property and began planting blueberries “in a big



EASTERN SHORE POST/CLARA VAUGHN

Helene and Charles Danner hold an old sign from Mason Beach Farm, the pick-your-own blueberry business they reopened after moving to the farm last summer. The farm is open to visitors from 8 a.m. to dusk daily.

way,” Danner said.

Byrne brought several varieties of blueberries from South Carolina, including the farm’s well-known rabbit-eye berries. He also added pears, peaches, plums, and apples in or-

chards that still stand on the farm.

In 1999, George and Joyce Foster bought the property and ran the pick-your-own business until George Foster passed away in 2016. The farm closed to visitors the next year.

Though the Danners are not sure when Mason Beach Farm opened to the public, they said three generations of residents have shared their memories of visiting the farm.

(Continued on page 21)



# 'If it hadn't been for Don, there wouldn't be a blueberry farm. He convinced us that this would be something for the community to re-open.'

Charles Danner of Mason Beach Farm, referencing Don Fogle

## Blueberries

(Continued from page 20)

"It's a local tradition to come here," Charles Danner said.

Since re-opening the business last summer, the Danners have carried on the tradition of welcoming customers to pick their own blueberries while adding their own flair to the farm. They no longer use pesticides, and Charles Danner planted 100 blueberry seedlings last year.

He said he plans to add 500 more this year to grow the farm for future generations.

"It means that this thing will be available for the future. That's our plan – to turn this over to whoever comes next and continue the tradition, because it is a special place," he said.

"I think it's the best-kept secret on the Eastern Shore," Helene Danner said.

Mason Beach Farm is open daily from 8 a.m. to dusk for visitors to pick their own blueberries. A small shed by the parking area has buckets and bags to hold the fruit, as well as bug spray to use.

Guests should bring cash to pay for the \$3-a-pound berries, which they weigh and pay for in the shed. The Danners recommend wearing long sleeves to avoid the bugs and packing plenty of water.

Blueberries should be bountiful for a few more weeks, with smaller harvests typically available through Labor Day, they said.

Visit [www.masonbeachfarm.com](http://www.masonbeachfarm.com) or search "Mason Beach Farm" on Facebook to learn more about the pick-your-own blueberry farm and check for updates on the blueberries or farm hours.

The farm is at 29113 Mason Beach Road, in Hacksneck.



EASTERN SHORE POST/CLARA VAUGHN

Helene Danner picks blueberries at Mason Beach Farm on Tuesday. She and her husband, Charles Danner, re-opened the pick-your-own blueberry farm when they moved there last summer. At left, rabbit-eye blueberries are ripe at Mason Beach Farm, in Hacksneck. The pick-your-own blueberry business is open daily from 8 a.m. to dusk and will have plenty of berries to pick for the next few weeks.



# Eastern Shore

JUNE 9, 2023

THE VOICE OF ACCOMACK AND NORTHAMPTON COUNTIES ON VIRGINIA'S EASTERN

ACCOMACK

## Samuel Cooper, circuit clerk, sets retirement

Has directed court since 1983: 'You're constantly learning'

BY CLARA VAUGHN  
Eastern Shore Post

When Samuel H. Cooper Jr. started his career, he planned to be a funeral service provider.

More than 40 years later, he is retiring after four decades of service as Accomack County's Clerk of Circuit Court.

"It's been a wonderful ride," said Cooper, who recently announced his retirement from the role he began in 1983.

"I've never had a day that I've dreaded coming to work," he said of his career.

A licensed funeral service provider, Cooper's career in the office on the Accomack courthouse green began in a funeral home.

Clifton Humbles, owner and operator of C.C. Humbles Funeral Service, where Cooper was working at age 27, was reading the newspaper one morning and saw the can-

(Continued on page 30)



EASTERN SHORE POST/TED SHOCKLEY FILE PHOTO  
Accomack County Circuit Court Clerk Samuel H. Cooper Jr. is retiring at the end of the year after 40 years on the job.



# Cooper

(Continued from page 1)

didates running for circuit court clerk.

“His question to the four of us was ... ‘Which one of these candidates do you think would hire people of color?’” Cooper said.

“He said, ‘This would probably be an opportune time for someone of color to run for the office and ... the person is sitting right here at this table.’”

Initially laughing at the prospect of running for the elected position, Cooper won by 47 votes. He has won the five elections since and will have served 40 years in the role in December.

He was the first Black employee not only to serve as the circuit court clerk in Accomack County, but also in the clerk’s office.

Cooper’s election was the first time a Black candidate on the Eastern Shore had been elected to a position required by the state constitution.

He started the job with the skills to look up a deed, so Cooper took a three-day trip to Charlottesville after winning the election to learn more about the duties of a circuit court clerk.

“Realistically, I was more confused after I left than when I got there,” he said. “You can’t pick up a textbook that says ‘Clerk of Court 101.’”

He attributes part of his early success in the position to inheriting “a good staff.”

Cooper laughed that he is still tackling the learning curve — and said that is part of what kept him in his role for 40 years.

“You’re constantly learning,” he said. “There are days that I can come into this office and I feel confident there’s nothing you can ask me that I can’t address, then that’s the very day that you come up with something that I’ve never heard of in my life.”

Sometimes, the requests have nothing to do with circuit court records.

He recalled one instance when a dialysis patient called Cooper’s office upset because a doctor had changed the time of her appointment.

He called the medical center to explain the situation and assisted in moving the appointment back.

“You don’t really know what to expect from one day to the next ... but



**Accomack Clerk of Circuit Court Samuel H. Cooper Jr. stands in his office Friday, June 2. He announced his retirement from the clerk of court position earlier this month after nearly 40 years serving Accomack County residents.**

EASTERN SHORE POST/CLARA VAUGHN

it’s been a very, very wonderful experience,” Cooper said.

“The most rewarding part is the fact that you earn people’s trust and you earn their confidence.”

He credits his family with supporting his career, recounting a time when, as president of the Virginia Court Clerks Association, he was arranging an annual convention on Chincoteague Island with the help of his wife, Sandra Cooper.

“Sandy and myself were soliciting door prizes from the businesses on Chincoteague and, if we went in to 10 businesses, eight of them knew her but didn’t know me,” he said.

His son, Cedrick L. Cooper Sr., an

accountant, plans to run for Accomack’s Clerk of Circuit Court position in the upcoming election, he said.

Cooper’s advice to his successor is to approach the role with compassion.

“What’s not important to you can be the epitome of importance to someone else,” he said. “This position can be a counseling session ... as much as an administrative position.”

He said he does not have specific plans following his retirement, but will be more active in his Cooper & Humbles Funeral Company, which his daughter, Shenae, manages.

His decision to retire, Cooper said, is to bring “new blood” to the role he

served for 40 years.

His hopes are for his replacement “to be open-minded to technology and innovations related to this office, and to do what you can to keep your employees happy.”

“I hope they can have a third of the enjoyment that I’ve had,” he added. “It’s been very rewarding in the fact that over the years, I have earned the respect of many residents.”

“It’s a humbling feeling when people have that much confidence in you.”

Cooper’s last day as Accomack County’s Clerk of Circuit Court will be Dec. 31, though he said he will be “in and out” of the office to assist his successor.