

AmericusScene

APRIL/MAY 2012

Dream House Marchant Home

A Giving Soul

Betty Pope

Forty Mule Music

The Barn

PLUS:

Heather Cross Stanley

Janice Siders

Café Campesino

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APRIL/MAY 2012

From the Editor:

With little or no winter and an early arrival of summer temperatures, it seems we skipped spring 2012 altogether!

But we were still able to enjoy the natural beauty of the azaleas and dogwoods in full bloom, lining the charming streets of the towns of Sumter and Schley counties.

It's rather refreshing now to sit back and read about the people and places featured in the May 2012 issue of Americus Scene magazine.

You will enjoy reading about the talented woman who is steering the ship of the historic Rylander Theatre in downtown Americus.

Then there's the interesting story of a young girl's fantasy about a beautiful house located in the historic district of Americus and how grateful she is today to be living that dream.

Read about how faith built (or renovated) a barn and how the rafters now ring with inspirational, Christian music.

You will also find stories about two other multi-faceted, talented women: Betty Pope and Janet Siders, each unique in her own way.

Also, find out how coffee built a bridge between distant farmers and Americus, Ga.! Cafe Campesino's history is one of hope and partnership in a world otherwise in turmoil.

We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed constructing it. It's easy when there are so many provocative people and their individual stories in our midst. We want to tell all those stories.



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AmericusScene

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AmericusScene
Established 2008
Volume V No. 1

Americus Scene magazine is published quarterly by
the Americus Times-Recorder

South Georgia Media Group

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Local artist finds dream house

her family home now

by Leila Sisson Case

AMERICUS — Behind the front gate at 128 Taylor St., the home of Rod and Lynn Marchant, a bit of serendipity mixes with a rich history that reaches back 160 years.

“I pinch myself some days, for it’s a dream come true to own this house I have admired since childhood,” said Lynn. “We are so fortunate and blessed.”

When the couple married, they envisioned a bright future and set long-range goals. Over the course of years, and through some ups and downs, they never lost sight of what they visualized as newlyweds 28 years ago.

Their first home was Fort Rucker, Ala., where Rod was in the U.S. Army and in helicopter flight training school. The first week of their marriage Rod told Lynn the career path he wanted. She met with this with enthusiasm but thought it too far into the future to give much thought.

When Lynn was a teenager, years before she and Rod married, she rode her bike to her first summer job teaching swimming at the recreation department under then Coach Jack Finklea. As she pedaled along a route that took her through the residential neighborhood that included Taylor Street, she admired the well-kept lawns and graceful ante-bellum and Victorian homes lining the tree-shaded streets. But one house in particular attracted her attention more than others.

It was the handsome brick house belonging to banker Charles F. and Georgia Lumpkin Crisp on Taylor Street. Lynn admired its beauty, especially in early spring when the graceful branches of the white snowball bush cascaded over the brick wall and never seemed to get enough of catching a glimpse of the exterior.



Behind the garden gate is the 1850s home of Rod and Lynn Marchant and their daughters Lauren-Leigh and Kelly.

“I rode my bike by the house every day that summer and remember asking Dad to drive by on our way to town,” she recalls.

As the years passed the Marchants never lost sight of their separate dreams.

While at Fort Rucker, where Rod was a helicopter flight instructor, their oldest daughter Lauren-Leigh Marchant, was born. After eight years the family returned to their roots in Sumter County and bought a farm near Leslie where Rod and his father, the late Charlie Marchant of Americus, went into business together to raise chickens. And they welcomed another daughter, Kelly, now 17 and a junior at the Madeira School in McLean, Va., near Washington, D.C.

Lynn said, “Living on the farm and having all the animals was wonderful when the girls were young and growing up. We loved our home and country living. But our needs were changing. Lauren-Leigh was entering high school and both children had outside school activities. I was tired of driving back and forth from the country and wanted

to live in town again. So, we began searching for a house that would fit our family’s changing lifestyle. We looked at many, especially in Americus’ historic residential district. Things seemed fruitless and I almost gave up when my mother called me one day.

“She said, ‘Lynn, you’ll never guess whose house is on the market.’ And when she told me Mr. Charlie’s, I thought, ‘there is no way we’ll ever be able to buy that house.’ That was the furthest thing from my mind,” said Lynn.

After much thought and discussion, the Marchants made an offer through their Realtor and purchased the house from the Crisp heirs in 2003. Lynn’s longtime dream became reality.

The ante-bellum house has a long and noteworthy history.

According to Alan Anderson, archivist for Sumter Historic Trust, it was built in 1850 by Alfred F. McPherson, a member of one of Sumter County’s pioneer families and an alderman on the first Americus City Council in 1856. Renovated in 1877 by Thomas

A. Graham, whose son later founded Graham Aviation at Souther Field, it served in the 1880s as the parsonage for what is now First Baptist Church. The Rev. Abner B. Campbell made additional improvements in 1887.

Henry Crisp, well-known Americus businessman and attorney, said his father purchased the house from a Mr. English about 1927, and it remained in the hands of the Crisp family for the next 76 years. Henry, his late sister, Virginia Crisp Gatewood, and brother, Charles R. Crisp (Charlie), now of Moultrie, grew up there.

Americus realtor Charles F. Crisp II of Americus, a grandson of Charles F. and Georgia Crisp, said three major renovations have been made since the original construction. The first in the 1870s was to extend the

house forward with the addition of the two big front rooms with 14-foot ceilings and tall windows. At the same time the chimneys were rebuilt and have never been changed. What is now the present dining room and downstairs bedroom are part of the original construction. The bedroom has the original cast-iron mantle while the twin mantle was moved from the dining room to the left front room, the present-day study. The more neo-classical Italianate mantle was added to the right front room, now the sitting room.

Crisp said a few years after his grandparents bought the house they decided to move to South Lee Street where the former office of Schley Gatewood, M.D. is today, perhaps to see if they liked the location better but apparently didn't because they returned to the Taylor



The view from the front door into the wide entry hall and graceful staircase that leads to the second floor.

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Street home and remained there for the rest of their lives. In the 1930s, the Crisps moved temporarily while extensive renovations were going on. The second floor with two bedrooms and bath was added along with the handsome stairway. Brick veneer was added to the exterior to give a more modern appearance. Beautifully detailed millwork was installed and the twin arched passage ways added between the sitting room and dining room connecting the two rooms. The front porch is probably from the 1920s. The more classical portico was added in 1965, and the exterior painted a soft green, the color it is today. The charming red brick fence, now covered in creeping fig, and classical wrought-iron gate were added.

“It’s a dream come true for me to know that this is our home,” said Lynn, during an interview and tour that began in the cozy sitting room filled with natural sunlight that streamed through the tall windows.

“Rod is a helicopter pilot with Saudi Aramco., the job he told me he wanted the first week we married,” Lynn said. “He divides his time between Ratanura, Saudi Arabia, and Americus. His incredible sense of foresight led him to take the position and it has turned out to be a great opportunity for all of us. We have experienced different cultures, extensive travel, expanded our horizons and learned to think outside the box,” she said. “My children think globally and Rod is responsible for giving our family this chance to grow. But Americus will always be home.”

Presently the family is in the fast lane. With Rod away for long stretches, and Kelly at boarding school, Lynn and

daughter Lauren-Leigh, 22, June bride-to-be of Jared Wall of Americus, are busy with wedding plans.

Renovations began as soon as they moved into the 5,000 sq. ft. house to make it more comfortable and suitable for their lifestyle while paying strict attention to the historical features. The Marchant home is warm and inviting as well as light and airy. High ceilings, tall windows, beautiful architectural features not found in houses built today lend character and are enhanced even more by an eye-pleasing interior color palette. Soft green, cheerful yellow, beige, terra cotta, copper, brown and dove gray provide a neutral background for Lynn’s original artwork — large abstracts in strong colors hang in almost every room and literally pop from the walls. She has a degree in fine arts from Georgia Southwestern and praised the art professors who taught her: Laurel Robinson, Jack Lewis, Ralph Harvey and Ben Paskus.

“They provided me with outstanding guidance and I received an incredible education during my student years studying under their tutelage,” she says. “We are very lucky to have a great art department at GSW.”

Lynn said, “William Blake is the artist that all of my art relates to with a strong influence with figure studies from the works of Michelangelo.”

Furnished with a mixture of family pieces, reproductions and antiques collected over the years, the sitting room is comfortable and cheerful. Family photographs are displayed on the tables. Portraits of Lauren-Leigh and Kelly at 2 1/2 wearing the hand-sewn christening gowns Lynn lovingly made adorn



Lynn Marchant in the master bedroom



The sitting room



An accomplished artist, Lynn Marchant with one her original abstracts.



The Empire chandelier illuminates the abstract paintings by Lynn that dominate one wall of the dining room.

the walls. In the adjoining dining room more of Lynn's abstracts dominate one wall while the Empire-period chandelier completes the dramatic effect. The adjoining breakfast room and large kitchen is the hub and family gathering place. Lynn and Rod both enjoy cooking and have their own work stations.

"We gutted the kitchen and enclosed the back porch to make more space," Lynn said.

The large heart pine table is used for family dining, and the kitchen island, a long table – equipped with marble slabs on three sides, from the childhood home of Lynn's mother Sara Paradise – is used for food preparation. The family pets, Polly, a dachshund, and Bella, a Maltese, have free reign of the house but enjoy relaxing in the warm kitchen most, perhaps waiting for a handout.

The space at the end of the back hall that leads into the kitchen and butler's pantry features a unique collection of art. The downstairs bedroom, painted a light olive green, features an eye-appealing group of etchings, a monoprint, oils on canvas and a painting Lauren-Leigh did on Plexiglas.

The guest room and the Marchant sister's bedroom and bath are upstairs but Lynn plans to turn one of the rooms into an art studio.

As the home tour concluded and with Polly and Bella finding something more interesting outside to chase, Lynn stops a moment to reflect once more on how fortunate her family is to be able to own the house she admired as a young girl and preserve its rich history for generations to come.

• • •

Dr. Harold Holloway Shelby Chapman, FNP-BC FAMILY PRACTICE



Seated at front, l-r: Shelby Chapman, FNP-BC and Dr. Harold Holloway
Standing, l-r: Brooke Belcher, office manager,
Lisa Albritton, receptionist and Stephanie Nelson, LPN

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A giving soul:

The gracious hospitality of Betty Pope

by Camille Bielby



Pope enjoys tussling with her daughter's fluffy dogs while she is traveling.

AMERICUS — A sunny morning in February with Betty Pope is enough inspiration to get anyone moving. And she stands ready to “let some of the younger generation take the reins. I love my community and my husband did, too.”

A caregiver herself, she does not plan to give up the Rosalynn Carter Institute which she helped form with William Capitan, Ph.D., the former president of Georgia Southwestern.

“Rosalynn graduated from Georgia Southwestern,” Pope says. “The school

wanted to honor her and the Center grew out of that.”

Her excitement over the groundbreaking for the new building grows from the satisfaction of seeing an important project through to the highest level of service.

She can call the first lady by name. She owns a cabin overlooking a crystal mountain stream with the Carters. A beaming black and white snapshot of the Popes showing President Carter a newspaper announcing his win hangs in her hallway. She and President Carter are smiling. The newspaper actually covers her husband John Pope’s face, which still makes her laugh.

That laughter is something she is known for, whether it is shared along with an anecdote about lunch with her girlfriends or offered as

an encouragement to the volunteers she works with. And who could say no to one of her gracious requests for a needy cause?

“Rosalynn has made such wonderful strides in mental health and care giving. I was a caregiver for my mother and husband at the same time,” said the soon to be 79-year-old Pope. “We will all be caregivers and we will all need care givers.”

Her schedule includes daily visits with her 95-year-old sister-in-law who

requires assisted care with full-time sitters.

“Her husband died in a nursing home and she has a horror of them,” Pope says.

“They lived in the other side of the house John Pope built and donated to Magnolia Manor. Gladys lived here with her husband for 10 years. My husband built the place in a U-shape so he could take care of his family when they got infirm.”

The Pope family has had use of the double home for three generations. A true Southern belle, Betty Pope was born in Jacksonville, Fla., but moved with her family to Miami before she was a year old. She lived at home and went to school right down the street. Pope completed her degree in three years because she wanted to get married.

“I was married at 20 and had both kids by 25,” she says.

Her first husband was a vice president for Margaret Ann Stores and handled taxes for what is now Winn Dixie.

“He went to the tax assessor in each town with a Winn Dixie and made sure they were all under the same tax structure,” she says.

The couple “moved up here to run the dairy farm for my father. But my husband didn’t enjoy milking three times every 24 hours.”

He enrolled in law school and they moved to Gainesville. She was pregnant with a daughter.

“He became a lawyer and we moved back to Miami where we lived for 18 years.”

She was in her early 20s in the 1950s when she lived in Americus for about three years. She was a member of the Junior Service League. Her grandmother was the first patient in the

Magnolia Manor nursing home.

"Magnolia Manor has been part of my life for many years. When Grandmother died, I stayed for a few days to help Daddy get acclimated. My future husband John called to express sympathy to my Daddy for his mom's death. He found out I was here and asked me to dinner at Daphne's Lodge and the courtship began."

She cherishes the memory of John Pope.

"When John married me in 1973, he beamed on Father's Day. He became the father of my two girls. He got three girls when we married. He took them like they were his own children.

"My youngest daughter stayed with her father and stepmother to finish high school. I brought the younger one here. She was in ninth grade. It was the perfect time to change. She had a wonderful group of girlfriends. They are the children of my girlfriends."

She talks about her life in Americus.

"Jimmy Carter was John's closest friend so he got involved in the campaign. We were Peanut Brigaders and did the whole bit."

John Pope purchased a concrete business from his father after returning from the war.

"Jimmy wanted to build a pool for the Plains Lions Club. They (Pope and Carter) became bosom buddies."

A train trip to the opening of the Daytona Race Track was an adventure that led to finding a rooming house at four in the morning.

"It was an inexpensive thing. You could have a lot of fun on nothing as far as your money goes. John and his wife never had children. He loved to be with Amy and the Carter boys."

Carter's campaign for Georgia governor is the source of fond memories.

"It is an awesome feeling to know we had that much part in the making of a president. Jimmy and Rosalynn came on a visit to Walnut Mountain, on Turnip Creek. We loved the waterfalls so much we agreed to build a cabin together. The waterfall's name is Rosalynn Rapids. We built a house for the Secret Service and a shop and pump house."

She doesn't go much but loved it when her husband was living. A limited edition print of President Carter's draw-

ing of the cabin's dining room rests atop a bookcase in her guest room.

"Rosalynn was joining us and he hadn't remembered to get her a present so he stayed up all night and drew and painted her favorite room," she recalls.

A panoramic view of the cabin hanging over the guest bed shows silhouettes of the Carters and Popes against a twilight sky on the porch of the cabin overlooking the rushing stream.

"It is ironic because Dad was born in Ellaville. I now own the farm he was born on. It has a cabin, two ponds — catfish and bass — and pine trees. I am proud of that. My father suffered a heart attack at 42, right after I had married for the first time."

Pope said they used to spend a lot of time at the farm.

"We would go fishing. Jimmy and Rosalynn would come over and fish. Daddy died in 1977, but he got to see the inauguration. Daddy and Jimmy were second cousins. We were friends first but I don't bother them. I can see them anytime if something happens that they need to know about, like the death of one of their supporters."



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Pope is a long-time member of First United Methodist Church in Americus.

"I was a Baptist, but I joined my husband's church," she says. "I like to associate with good Christians. I always feel like if Jesus were to walk in any-time, I wouldn't want to be ashamed of what I am thinking or doing."

She has "been in everything at church and served on everything. But I am dropping back. With a cane, it is hard to do much serving."

And then she refers to herself as a "little old lady" which is hard to reconcile with the vivacious woman serving pots of tea and a plate of fruit and cookies.

A friend brought her a vase with pretty red roses for Valentine's Day.

"I thought to myself, I used to go to the Manor and take stuff like this to little old ladies.' My heart and head want to do everything. I can't do it anymore and it breaks my heart. It is innately what I want to do. Your body tells you what to do."

She ticks off "rest, diet and medication. You have to listen to your body. I started falling. I had my first fall in Sienna, Italy on a cobblestone walk. I was on the way to buy a cane. I didn't get hurt," she says.

She decorates the quad cane she has been using the past 10 years for balance. Her canes are ready for any season, from Valentine's Day to Christmas.

"I might as well decorate it," she says. "It is part of your attire."

She has five canes in many colors to go with different outfits.

"They encourage me to keep it by the bed. Most falls happen in the middle of the night when your equilibrium and balance are off. I keep everything clear on the floor."

Pope feels badly that the cane encumbers people.

"People will trip over it," she says. "You don't want to break a hip."

Arthritis gives her trouble especially in times of rough weather, she says. She has fibromyalgia and eye problems. Light sensitivity makes it difficult to drive at night.

"My daughter surprised me and moved to Americus," she says. "She had an empty nest. Her kids were not coming home as often. She decided to be closer to her mother and start a new life. She was a soccer mom with three children and a limited social life. Both girls have their masters and her son is a junior at Tulane."

Naturally, Pope is proud.

"They are all very bright and I feel they are going to be able to have good lives. Carrie (her daughter) and I can enjoy visiting them. They come more now that she is more centrally located than Tampa. She has been here a year and a half."



A bouquet of tulips matches Betty Pope's winning smile.

Popes' other daughter lives in New Zealand with her husband and high school daughter.

Pope's girlfriends are very special.

"We all play cards, Canasta and Hand and Foot. I play bridge. I had this permanent card table set up," she gestures to the tea treats spread across the gleaming wood. "We set up many tables for cards, baby showers and barbecues. We had a Royal Wedding party at 4 a.m."

Pope's friends all came in furs and hats.

"I treated them to crumpets and nosegays. My cousin who teaches school had to go straight in. There were a dozen of us. We had a good time and criticized the wedding."

She says she is not a goody good, but she doesn't drink or smoke.

"You only come through this life

once so you have to make the best of it," she says. "I choose not to, but am fine if my friends want to bring their own. I don't serve it."

Life is good, Betty Pope assures. She has a million memories and photographs.

"I need to organize my photographs. I have 15 shots of my husband at the rim of the Grand Canyon. It is hard to throw your husband in the trash. All the shots are different."

She tells of the sentiment behind the many lovely mementos that tell the story of her life and travels.

"We had a big house full of furniture and things. I tried to leave, but I had to empty that house before I could make this home."

She has a sad memory of their trip to Taiwan.

"John wasn't well. He died in November. I got E-coli in December. I got run down and was so exhausted."

As she rebuilt her life and regained her energy, she began planning a trip for the entire family to go on an African safari in Kenya and Tanzania for two weeks.

"I wrapped up little animals and put them in a barrel and let each person draw one and open it to figure out what I was telling them. The shots to get ready to go were the worst part."

No more trips like that for her, she says. A trip to New Zealand to visit her daughter was a rough "30 hours from her door to mine. We went first class, but I couldn't stay seated. I had to stretch my legs out. And the airport confusion got to me. I won't be doing it again."

She is a Democrat with Republican friends. Her friends are all ages with different interests.

"We don't talk politics," she says.

Her book club is led by Connie Blanchard.

"Connie used to teach this sort of thing in her years as a professor," says Pope. "The club is like grad school. We meet at The Station and discuss the book for two to three hours. She gives us grueling questions. I love it. We are avid readers and I get so much more out

of the books.”

Pope feels special that Blanchard puts so much into it. Blanchard came to Americus when her husband accepted the post as president of Georgia Southwestern.

Pope’s theory is that she would rather know that her “daughters are enjoying life while they are young enough. It is enough for me to watch them enjoy it.”

She gave the girls a trip to anywhere in the world for a Christmas gift and they chose Turkey and Greece.

“I told them go while you can, don’t wait until you get to an age when you don’t enjoy it. I have been there and done that and I want to bask in the glory that they are enjoying themselves. I could outlive them.”

She says that cancer runs rampant in her family and that both girls have battled it.

“It is just such an unknown factor — it’s there,” she says.

She is asked about the Pope scholarships that benefit so many in Americus. She now has the Pope Fellows scholarship for qualified students in the field of care giving, like

nursing, pre-med, teaching, religion — any fields that involve helping people. There are 16 students on this scholarship. She established a business scholarship at Georgia Southwestern State University in honor of her father. South Georgia Technical College created a construction scholarship that she funds because “we don’t have enough local contractors.” And of course there is the John Pope Center at South Georgia Technical College, where she has her own reserved parking place.

When she lists the boards she serves on — the Plains Historic Preservation board, the Sumter Historic Trust, the Rylander, the Foundation at Georgia Southwestern, the Georgia Council for the Arts, the animal shelter, and now the Manor board — you get the idea just what cutting back will mean, to Betty Pope and to Americus’ many philanthropic organizations.

“I would rather be in charge than to work with someone doing a lousy job,” she says.

She has a degree in business management from the University of Miami. She holds beauty titles for a smile and personality that charm people into

action.

Her Poinciana Queen portrait hangs in the hall across from the Carter memorabilia snapshot. The beautiful red blossoms are a glorious accessory to her eyes and smile.

“Before this year, I would still go to meetings and keep my nose in what’s going on. Now I have to stop doing that and let them handle it without me,” she says.

She mentions yet another project that she may not be able to continue.

“Until this year I was active in an arthritis support group trying to eliminate the stigma of arthritis.”

She says it is important to become educated on what can be done.

“You can learn to live with it and you need to be aware of the medicines that can help. As many as 75 would meet at Magnolia Manor. It was also good because people came to the Manor and saw what it is like. It used to be the place to go to die.”

She is a member of Magnolia Manor’s League of the Good Samaritan which raises money to help residents who outlive their resources.

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them," she says. "We are all uncertain when our time is going to come to leave this earth."

When not coordinating her philanthropic projects and visiting with her daughter and girlfriends, Betty Pope can often be found in her studio painting.

"I like water colors. I donate to charities for silent auctions. I painted the garden at the new hospital to make note paper and tablets for opening night."

She has sketched events as they are going on so that benefactors could frame the drawings and auction them off.

"I wouldn't live in the big city now. This is the right place for me. You can always go to Albany, Columbus and Atlanta shopping with your girlfriends."

She likes to have a group at her cabin.

"We call it Camp Canasta. We go on Friday night and spend Friday and Saturday night. We light a fire and eat junk food. We have a big breakfast. It is a slumber party and we have a good time playing cards from 6 a.m. to midnight. We watch a movie and eat popcorn."

She reiterates the importance of girlfriends. She has a Wednesday night group, the "No Cooking Supper Club." They visit different restaurants.

"We are an eclectic group and we catch up on what's going on," she says. One of her biggest groups is her Sunday School class.

"It is a caring class, with teams that take quarterly responsibility for those who are sick and hospitalized. We bring food and flowers when there is a death in the family," she says, adding that the class has an impressive membership of 70.

Her patriotism runs deep. She gets a lump in her throat when she sees a marching band.

"The apathy of young people and lack of respect for the flag and veterans" led her to found a high school scholarship. Each spring high school seniors have the opportunity to write a paper in 500 words or less about patriotism. The papers are given to an English teacher who turns blind copies over to a committee. Prizes of \$1,000, \$750, \$500 and \$100 are awarded for the best entries.

"It is interesting to read the

approach of each child," she says. "It could be a foreign student who has moved to the United States and appreciates it here. The money can go for college, clothes or a car."

The response from parents is wonderful.

"They thank me for making their child think about patriotism and citizenship and a lot of respect comes from that."

Her husband was civic minded.

"So was I. My father was generous," she says. "I just feel so fortunate with my life. Hard luck falls on everyone at some time."



One of Pope's favorite mementos is a portrait of her family with the Carters on the porch of their shared mountain cottage.

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by Leila Sisson Case

AMERICUS — Heather Cross Stanley, managing director of the historic Rylander Theatre in downtown Americus, compares preparing for her present job to that of an athlete training for the Olympics. She's been rehearsing for the stellar role all her life.

"I love my work — I always enjoy saying there aren't many people who have an entire theater for their office," said Stanley who observes three years at the Rylander in the fall.

The theater is all Stanley has ever known — a love affair that actually began when she was no more than a toddler growing up in adjoining Lee County. With a naturally outgoing personality, she is not reluctant about stepping up to a challenge.

At age four, she walked into Albany Christian Church with her parents, Darrell and Ranan Cross — the family's first time to visit — while a rehearsal for a musical was in progress.

"I went right up on stage and joined the cast," said Stanley. "The performing arts are an area that I have been interested in and loved all my life."

The love affair became more ardent when she was seven and her mother enrolled her in the summer drama workshops offered by Theatre Albany, the city's community theater organization.

"I participated every year from age seven to 14 and then in 2001 actually conducted them," said Stanley.

Rylander Theatre's Heather Cross Stanley

"I've always known my career was in theater. I had other outside interests but none this passionate," she said.

Stanley attended Lee County schools from kindergarten through 12th grade and was an honor student. She was very active in the high school's theater and drama department — in fact the entire family got into the act. Her mother made costumes for shows and her father helped work on the sets. She met her future husband Chris Stanley when they were both cast in "Annie Get Your Gun" when she was a sophomore and he was a senior. Fourteen years later — January 2010 — they married on the Rylander Theatre stage, a few months after she accepted her present position.

Graduating from high school with honors, Stanley received a full theater scholarship from Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville. After two and a half years she accepted a position with the Dougherty County school system to teach drama to kindergarten through fifth-grade students. She continued her education at the University of Georgia, Athens, but transferred to Valdosta State University (VSU), Valdosta, graduating with the bachelor of fine arts degree in theater with a technical emphasis.

As a senior Stanley had the starring role in an original play written by VSU alumnae Deb Fordham, an Emmy award-winning writer for the TV show "Scrubs." Stanley said the play, named "Holler Me Home," is about life in the

Okefenokee Swamp during the difficult days of the Great Depression and is based on the life of the playwright's family.

"Deb wanted Randy Wheeler, Ph.D., someone she knew and trusted, to direct," said Stanley. "The show's debut in Valdosta was a big success and after the run, we went on the road to perform at the Out of the Loop Festival in Addison, Texas, and enjoyed another success."

Stanley worked for Peach State Summer Theater based in Valdosta, a professional rotating repertory theater, where she co-created the Avastama Play Festival with a friend, Marty Lynch.

"Avastama means discovery in Estonian and that is what we did. We showcased original, unpublished 10-minute plays by partnering with the Valdosta community theater," she said. "The festival was very well attended and a successful venture that we would have continued but I moved away."

Graduating in December 2008, she went back to the classroom to study for a high school teaching certificate but mid-way through the semester, she read an advertisement about the search for a managing director at the Rylander Theatre and applied. The rest is history.

"I am so very, very happy I made that decision to apply for the job and naturally was thrilled when selected," said Stanley. "I find my job rewarding, exciting, challenging, educational and wonderful. The connections I have made

“
*I find my job rewarding,
exciting, challenging,
educational and wonderful...*

in the community and the opportunities to work with some of the best people are great. I am so impressed with how hard everyone works to help keep this city thriving – from the City staff to the Americus-Sumter Chamber of Commerce and all the many different groups and organizations who come together to work for the betterment of Americus and Sumter County.”

Stanley described the historic Rylander Theatre as, “My 91-year-old toddler – it leaks and constantly cries, but it’s my job to see that it’s taken care of properly. I feel very protective of the building itself and its history. Luckily I receive a lot of preservation advice from Molly Fortune, the director of restoration at the Fox Theater Institute in Atlanta.”

The Americus Theater and Cultural Authority, the governing body of the Rylander, is affiliated with

the Fox Theater Institute – a program that offers small historic theaters in Georgia like the Rylander help in all areas of theater operation at no charge.

Stanley answers to the Authority’s board of directors and laughingly says she has nine bosses. She works closely with the Friends of the Rylander directors, the fundraising body, to develop an annual presenter’s season – four or five productions that are typically professional touring companies. She is a member of the Georgia presenters (a part of the Fox Theatre Institute) which promotes block booking.

“Block booking occurs when three or more theaters in the same state book the same play in a given time,” said Stanley. “The cost of the production is significantly reduced so we can get higher quality performances at a more reasonable rate.”

Through the Rylander’s

affiliation with the Fox Theatre Institute Stanley was part of a special U.S. delegation to the annual Contact East conference in Antigonish, Canada, in September 2010, for a week of drama showcases and professional development.

“I received a full scholarship (all expenses covered at no cost to the Rylander) from the Canadian Arts Council,” said Stanley.

There were less than 15 U.S. presenters represented and she was one of two from Georgia in the group with North Carolina presenters. During these showcases, artists perform a sample of their act in 30-minute segments. As a result, the Rylander hosted “A Christmas Carol” last November.

“As soon as I saw Jeremy Webb’s showcase I knew he was someone I wanted to bring to the Rylander,” said Stanley.

“Once I returned home, I pitched his production to my Georgia presenter’s colleagues. A U.S. tour was then formed in conjunction with the North Carolina presenters. I might never have found such talented performers had I not been given the opportunity to go to Contact East.”

The Friends’ second annual gala this past January, “Sons of Sailors,” a Jimmy Buffett musical tribute was a big success and drew more than 400 theater patrons from a wide area of southwest Georgia.

The Friends’ final season presentation was “Drinkin’ Singin’ Swingin’,” on March 31.

Stanley said, “This is a tribute to Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin and straight from the Las Vegas strip. The show pays homage to the iconic singers, the originals kings of cool. They banter back and



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forth; they discuss what Frankie, Sammy and Dino would say about pop culture today and promise to have the audience, at the very least, singing and swingin' in their seats."

Months ago Stanley began working on the Friends' 2012-2013 season, five live performances and one movie series, which should be booked by the end of spring and announced. Stanley has already booked the 2013 annual gala, "Masters of Motown," for Saturday, Jan. 12, 2013.

"The sextet of singers, three men and three women, with a back-up band will perform all Motown favorites like those made famous by the Supremes and the Temptations and others groups," said Stanley.

Planning, coordinating and presenting the Friends' 2011 gala "Almost Elton John" was Stanley's first experience in essentially putting together an event of this magnitude.

"It stands out as my most exciting experience since I've been at the Rylander and it was a wonderful success," said Stanley. "The house was packed and everyone had a fabulous time."

Presenting shows are just part of her responsibilities. She constantly deals with issues with the aging building.

"Learning the quirks of the building and staying on top of them – from the leaky roof to bats slipping in through minuscule cracks – are issues that we work with every day," she said.

Stanley said, "My main goal is to expose everyone in the community to the performing arts in some fashion. I love it when I overhear children's comments such as, 'I performed on that stage at my dance recital' or see those here for the first time stand in awe of the beauty of this place. It makes me feel good to be a part of introducing another generation to the performing arts and know that we are helping to cultivate thoughtful and well-rounded students."

She continually strives toward making the Rylander's presence known on a state level and to be an economic driver in the community. According to the theater's records, more than 14,000 patrons attended a show or event during FY 2010-2011.

The Rylander Theatre partners with Sumter Players, the community theater

organization, and serves as venue for its four annual productions as well as the two shows presented by Georgia Southwestern State University's dramatic arts department.

She also manages the full-time staff of four: Brenda Burns, administrative assistant; Lane Marchant, technical director; Will Dozier, box office manager; Juana Steele, custodian and from five to 10 interns, depending on how many are needed to handle a show.

The hands-on attitude Stanley takes in handling her wide range of duties from building maintenance to difficult show agents and sometimes finicky performers is resulting in a standing ovation for the stellar job performance she's been rehearsing for a lifetime.



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FORTY MULE MUSIC

by Camille Bielby

{ THE BARN }

ANDERSONVILLE — The old rugged cross shines hope over the pews in the old 40-mule barn tucked away on an old plantation near Andersonville. It is an enormous focal point anchored safely in the rafters above the stage in Southwest Georgia's premier gospel performance venue.

According to Paul Hall, getting it up there took help from God's hand — and many others. A ladder leading to the loft level looks frail against the battered wood, some that was already ancient when The Barn was constructed in 1910.

The symbolism in this cross is as weighty as its behemoth 11-foot, eight-inch wood frame. The 400-pound frame was craned into the loft at the front of the building and then carried over the precarious jigsaw puzzle of a plywood path to the rear of the building. C.L. Parker and Dr. Jim Herron helped Hall create the plans and find the wood and stained glass for the 400-pound cross. It took eight men to move the metal-reinforced frame to the rear of the loft.

Hall insisted on installing the glass after the ancient wood was bolted into the place of honor. The yellow and green panes were donated to Hall by the Mount Carmel deacons when the church was demolished in 1995. The glass was the only thing that could be salvaged from the Andersonville church which was built in 1850. The heart pine two by eights forming the frame were salvaged by a friend of Hall's from a church constructed in 1890, near Eufaula, Ala. Hall found the shining red pane at the heart of the cross at a glass shop in Americus.

"When you summarize, you have stained glass from a church built in 1850, timbers from a church built in



The Barn, Southwest Georgia's premier southern gospel performance venue, is located off Ga. Highway 49 near Andersonville.



Hall recounts a misunderstanding with Ernie Dawson of the eight halls in his Daddy's four-room house.

1890, put together by a retired physician, in a barn that was built in 1910," he says.

It brings to mind the question of how many souls

have worshiped in the presence of the wood and glass salvaged from ages ago.

Hall's description of the theatrical unveiling of the cross is magical. Using fishing line, he rigged up a black veil that was whisked away as the cross was lit for the first time. You can picture it: the awe that must have crossed every face in The Barn.

"Whatever we do, we can do it under the cross," Hall said at the unveiling.

With only the storm-filtered early March light washing in from another panel of the salvaged stained glass, the cross bathed rows of pews in a spectral

glow. The blowing rain sounded like a chorus of angels thanking Hall for brightening up the afternoon.

The gospel singer with the musical name lights up much like the cross when he talks about all the people who made The Barn what it is today. A comfortable place to share Sweetwater Ministry's love for the deep roots of southern gospel music.

Hall's touch is on every single board and beam in the 50' x 80' mule barn. He has virtually disassembled, cleaned and restored every board in sight. And a few that were not. He proudly points out a zig-zag of darkness on the glowing pine by the entrance. The grime was hidden by an old staircase and stands as testimony to the back-breaking work of extracting a place of worship from a mule barn.

The plantation-grown lumber was called into service in the early 1900s when the pines it was milled from had already been dancing under Southwest Georgia skies for over 100 years.

The 19-inch planks were milled on

site and knot patterns reveal that many planks were harvested from single trees. Big trees. Big barn.

With the rainstorm reverberating on the tin roof, it is easy to appreciate The Barn's modern amenities.

"We used to have to spread plastic out over the pews after each performance," Hall says.

He points to the new tin in the shadows of the rafters that seems to be keeping the beat with the voices of the gospel singers coming from The Barn's massive speakers.

"We went through and cut out each rotten rafter by hand. We kept it open," he says and shows where a new seating loft will soon rise up for an even more amazing view of the stage. "The acoustics up there are wonderful."

Where 40 mules once recovered from a grueling day under the blazing south-

ern sun, 250 people gather to hear some of the best gospel groups in the South. Hall saves room in the schedule for a few local performers each year, but brings in well-known names nearly every month.

The eclectic collection of pews donated by churches upgrading their sanctuaries makes you wonder how many people have worshiped in those seats before they were brought into The Barn's ministry.

The size of a plantation was often gauged by how many mules were required to sow and reap the crops. A 20-mule team farm produced a significant tonnage of cotton in the days before combines. Caring for and feeding 40 mules was serious business. And more back-breaking labor.

A massive hay hook is suspended from a monorail extending the length of The

Barn. The hook was pulled along the rail by ropes, outside the building and dropped down to the hay wagon. It would trip itself to clutch up a massive pile of hay in its reaching claws. It was pulled up and back into the loft to feed 40 hungry mules a day.

The hay trough extended along a wall that is now a photo gallery. Trying to retain as much of the building's original character as possible, Hall was working to shore up the trough's framework when the whole structure came tumbling down.

A doorway leads from the cathedral into the barn's old feed room. It serves as a charming dining hall and kitchen. He carved through a concrete wall so that guests do not have to step over a knee-high threshold to enjoy refreshments.

The Last Supper print

that hung in Hall's family home now holds pride of place at the end of the family-style dining table. The feed room ceiling is made from roofing tin salvaged from the main house.

A leaded-glass window and door overlook the tranquil pecan grove drinking up the early spring rain. An odd assortment of solid-wood doors is interspersed among the planks of barn wood lining the interior of the feed room. Ladies offer refreshments like pimento cheese sandwiches, chili, hamburgers, hot-dogs, cookies and cakes to raise funds to improve the kitchen.

The home was built by Robert Hodges who supplied Capt. Henry Wirz with produce from the plantation to feed the prisoners down the road at Andersonville. Hall encourages learning about the story from Peggy Sheppard's book on

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The 400-lb. cross has stained glass from a church built in 1850, timbers from a church built in 1890, and was put together by a retired physician in a barn that was built in 1910.



The wall of fame hangs where a hay trough fed 40 mules every day.

Andersonville. Documents bring Wirz' impossible struggle to provide for the Union prisoners of war to life.

As the barn full of mules toiled to nourish the captives, so Sweetwater Ministries now uses the building to feed the spirit of southern gospel lovers.

"Mr. Hodges was a circuit preacher," Hall says. "That's how he ended up here. He was an educated man in his day. He was what was called an inferior judge, which meant he managed things like county road work. He was a talented man."

Remodeling and renovation of The Barn began eight years ago this coming December.

"I came out here one Christmas Day," Hall recalls. "It was in pretty bad shape. There were no doors. The wall was open. It was late in the afternoon. The sun had dropped into the West and was shining on all the junk piled in here. And it hit me. 'This was the place.'"

Hall performed with a gospel group called Sweetwater along with Elaine Hargrove and Johnny Daniels. They traveled on weekends and performed all over South Georgia. The Ludowici native was in a boy's quartet at the First Baptist Church. He was steeped in southern gospel and music from a very young age. His father played harmonica and called square dancing.

"We used to go to Waycross for all-night sings," Hall remembers. "You would get there before the sun went down and didn't leave until the sun came up."

Like Hodges on his circuit, the members of Sweetwater were constantly traveling for their ministry.

"The spouses were supportive and sacrificed family time," Hall says.

When he moved to Andersonville in 1965, Hall

started attending church at Salem United Methodist. He still teaches Sunday School there. He sang with a group called Salem Heirs.

"It just took off for us," he says. "That's how we got into the singing business."

Hall wants the old mule barn to be a shining light to the community.

"When it comes to the best in southern gospel, the most noted groups come to The Barn," he says, pointing out the different groups whose autographed photographs line up on the gleaming plank wall.

The smiling faces of Gold City, Palmetto State Quartet, Living Waters, Five for One, Cleghorns, Toomey Family, Dixie Echoes, Dove Brothers, Heirline and Ernie Dawson hang above a bank of pews beside the flag that draped Hall's father's casket. Two more flags flank the cross shining overhead behind a manger.

"The Barn does an excellent job preparing for the singings. They are just really professional people," says Sidney Jones of the Band Five for One. "Being in the gospel music ministry is a blessing. It is very rewarding to be able to share your beliefs about what you think God is and who He is to you."

Jones believes that southern gospel's enduring popularity is "because most of the people that we know were raised up in church. It just takes you back to growing up and coming to your faith. It takes you back there and keeps you in touch with who Jesus really is."

Jones' father is a Southern Baptist minister and a gifted vocalist and like Hall, Jones grew up singing in the choir. Five for One has been performing old gospel favorites for 18 years. Jones and his band mates, Mark Peavy, Vernon Kirksey, Charles Jones and Gary

Mixon, have a large local following that filled up The Barn with their two performances.

Performances are held at 7 p.m. every second Saturday. Hall climbed down from a ladder where he was working on signs for an upcoming Ernie Dawson appearance. Programs for upcoming shows are artfully pinned inside the lighted wooden showcase that greets visitors at the double-glass front door. Larry Stanley built it from old barn wood.

"We had it outside but the wind got it and blew it over on the concrete," Hall says. "We replaced it with Plexiglas."

Hall was joking with Ernie Dawson in the middle of a sing "about being poor. He talks real slow. He's from Tennessee. I told him my Daddy built a house with four rooms and eight halls. You could tell it puzzled him."

His eyes sparkle as he tells about sitting at the table after the sing and telling him, 'Ernie, you acted like you were dumbfounded.' He told me 'I thought you said hogs. I wondered why your Daddy had hogs in the house.'

Hall walks around with a broom showing the framed needlepoint work mingling with a collection of art work. The focal point of the gallery wall is a gilt-framed light-house that is reminiscent of one of his favorite gospel songs. But the most cherished is a photograph of his grandson in the foreground pointing to a red barn, dreamily out of focus in the distance.

Hall's son worked with him to clear out all the junk.

"We had been working on it for about a year when I knocked down against the base of this post and hit rock," he says.

He shows how he knocked down against a support beam with a shovel and realized it was vintage mule

manure caked down for what turned out to be several feet. His son helped dig it all out over four and a half days. They put down sand and hay stubble and set out benches and folding chairs for the first sing.

"We had a group out of Texas: Men of Music. They got in some good singing and people got to moving and the benches got to rocking on the sand and the folding chairs started sliding," Hall chuckles.

"The first winter you could look out through the tin – hot air going out – no doors. People were brave in that time. They would dress heavy. The spirit was great," he says.

The blankets Hargrove has draped over the back pew are still welcome on a cold winter night. Hall runs a shop heater, but it is too loud to run during a sing.

"Elaine is good at coming up with stuff like the blankets. She handles all the booking," he says.

He gestures along the opposite wall draped in heavy garnet folds. "The Lord has blessed us," he says. "He has led us through and has provided along the way. It is not finished. I want to go down this wall with a series of stained glass windows. I have the glass. I just need to put it all together."

"One night at the end of a singing, I asked for volunteers. A couple walked up and asked what they could do to help. I told them we wanted to put up doors. They said 'What about Monday?'"

That's how he met a Michigan couple who were in town helping with the aftermath of the tornado.

"Every time they come down, they are a big help," he says. "It takes two people to hold and nail a board."

"The Lord has His hand in it. People want to help

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Elaine Hargrove went down to “Kevin Crook’s and they got to talking about concrete sealer. A young man who works for the company was there. He told her to pick out the color you want and tell him much how we need. The company will donate it to The Barn. After the next singing we will put it down.”

Hall is proud of the good people who have worked hard on the building and the ministry.

“Elaine Hargrove has been here since day one,” he says. “The ladies from the churches donate meals to feed the men out here on work days. Faye Herrin, Barbara Fore, Grady and Shirley Bell, Carol and Jim Wilkerson and so many others have donated so much to make all this.”

Hall feels fortunate to be a part of it. He came to Andersonville to work for

American Cyanamid when he completed his civil engineering degree at Southern Tech.

“They planned to build Plant Five and sent me to Arkansas to learn that plant,” he says.

He was there for two years when he got an offer to come back and start the new Mulcoa operation.

“I was out there long enough to meet my wife,” Hall smiled. “I like to tease her that she followed me to Georgia.”

Jeannie taught school a few years before staying home with their two sons. Hall has worked for Mulcoa for 42 years.

“We always go outside to have a prayer before a singing. One night, it started raining. A state patrolman brought out umbrellas. One of the singers, Cornbread, was a big guy,” Hall gestures tall and wide. “Cornbread opens up one of those little umbrellas and pulls me up

under there with him, right under the stream. I said, ‘man, are you trying to drown me here?’”

In the summer, it takes a lot to keep the Bahia grass mowed.

“You want to present as best as you can when you have company coming,” he says.

The best thing about it for Hall is “seeing the satisfaction people get out of coming to The Barn and learning that some people’s spiritual needs are being met.”

He remembers when his good friend from Andersonville, Jack Teasely was hooking up the stage lights as the first bus of singers was pulling in.

“That’s how close we were cutting it.”

His favorite gospel song is “Midnight Cry” by Gold City. He enjoys performing “I’ll Take Jesus” which was written by Randy Shellnut of

the Dixie Echoes.

“I am a firm believer in what the Bible says about those who are given much,” he says. “Much is expected. The Lord blessed me. It is right to be involved in this, to give something back. The real workers are the volunteers and supporters. Without them, it wouldn’t have been possible.

“If you get your lost friends here, they will hear some gospel before they leave. It is not just entertainment. That is a big part of it, but it is not the purpose. The Barn doors are always open for anyone who wants to come and find some peace and joy.”

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The reinventions of Janice Siders

by Joni Woolf

AMERICUS — New Jersey native Janice Siders took a circuitous path to end up in Americus, Ga., and the story of her journey is a compelling one. Standing tall at her desk at Georgia Southwestern State University where she is director of Human Resources, Siders is an impressive figure whose walk barely hints of a condition that is about to require complicated foot surgery and an extended period of healing. She hardly mentions it. Instead she talks about the journey from there – New Jersey, to here – Americus, about opportunities that she latched onto, about the challenges of a young black woman possessed of a fierce determination to make a better life – and of her determination to pass that on to her children.

Born and raised in Newark, N.J., she was, she says, born to be a teacher. “In our family, it was understood I would go to college,” she says.

Neither parent finished high school, and college was important to them. Despite his lack of formal education, her father was an avid reader, and she credits this attribute with her own love of reading. If she had to pick a role model, however, it would be her mother.

“My mom worked hard and raised three daughters as a single parent,” Siders says.

Her parents divorced when she was in junior high, but her mother, who had come from a strong family, inherited that strength, and became a property owner, in addition to working in a challenging job as supervisor of food services at the county hospital.

“All three of her daughters,” Siders says of her mother, “and most of her grandchildren, are college-educated.”

A graduate of Rutgers, The State University in New Jersey, Siders also achieved credits from American International University as she prepared herself for a career in teaching. When asked if her college career led her straight to Americus, she laughed.

“Oh no! Lots of other careers!” she says.

She started teaching high school English, then middle school English and history. Following that, she became a staff writer for the New York Times Information Service. Leaving that position, she took a job with Prudential as a contract drafter for the Asset Management Co. That was followed by positions with PAMCO and Prudential Health Care; then she came to Atlanta as the Regional administrative manager for Prudential Capital. She didn’t know it then, but she was working her way to Americus.

Siders took a position as Human Resources manager for Textron and then Collins & Aikman, where she stayed six years. The Human Resources position at Georgia Southwestern became open, and she has been in this position for almost seven years. It fits her. She moves with ease throughout the university community, and has made friends outside the ivy walls. An avid tennis player, she is active in that community, and boasts many friends with whom she plays. In the HR office, Siders supervises two employees and usually has two or three student interns.

“Everywhere I’ve worked,” Siders says, “I’ve been on Boards – from Minority Interchange, to the Prudential Foundation, to the Red Cross, United Way, Girl Scouts, the Technical College, the Chamber of Commerce,” and she has served as mentor to several students. She is on the Strategic Planning Committee for the USGHR (University of Georgia Human Resources Association) and the planning committee for their two annual conferences.

“I believe it is incumbent upon the head of HR to get involved,” she says. “It encourages other employees to do the same, and it gets the employer’s name out in the community.”

An avid sportswoman, Siders attends most sports events, especially the tennis matches. She works out on



Known for her gregarious nature, Janice Siders smiles towards visitors as she greets them on the steps of the Wheatly Administration Building.

camp at least three times a week (even with a bum foot) and she is now the tennis official for GSW’s home matches.

This woman never stops. And, she encourages her employees to take care of themselves, to use the gym and other facilities for personal improvement. She is, obviously, a good “boss.”

Siders does have interests outside the university community. An avid reader, she takes her Nook tablet with her everywhere she goes – everywhere. She reads when she has five or 10 minutes, whether it’s in the doctor’s office or the grocery store check-out line.

“The Nook,” she says, “is my best friend!”

She has traveled extensively with her adult children and other family members. They have been to Rome, London, Paris, Brazil; they have cruised

Janice Siders at her desk in the Human Resources office.



the Mediterranean, the Caribbean (Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Bahamas), Mexico, and have been to China. This year they are taking the children on a Disney cruise. Because her primary family is back in New Jersey, she helps create these special times so they can all be together. Her two daughters and her grandchildren – a girl, 7, and a boy, 10 – are obviously a big part of her life, and they are all there for each other. The family connection is a strong one, and they work to keep it that way. Yet, life alone, away from family, has advantages.

“I work a 24-hour day, it seems,” she says. “When I leave here, often between 7 and 9 p.m., I hop on my computer at home to keep on top of work-related e-mails.”

Siders is never far away from university life, except for those brief respites with family when they get far, far away. She is totally enmeshed in life on campus.

“Each semester, we hire two or three students to work in our office and I spend time working with kids who are majoring in HR management,” she says. “... Our students are sharp and we are so proud of them, because when they leave here, they do really well. All of our interns have gotten really good jobs and really make an impression on their supervisors.”

The woman is committed.

When asked how she gets through life’s difficulties, i.e., what sustains her, Siders has an unusual answer.

“I try to look beyond what’s causing the challenge or issue. I call it ‘projecting.’ If something unpleasant is supposed to happen on the 13th (like her surgery that was scheduled for Feb. 13) I think about what things will be like on April 13. Hopefully I’ll be back on my feet and healed.”

She continued: “When my kids were little I taught them what I call ‘hypnosis’ when they had a bad dream. I would have them recite all of the stuff they loved until they drifted back to sleep: ice cream, candy, birthday parties, tap shoes, puppies, presents ... It always worked and now they’re teaching it to their kids.”

Siders had a serious health scare two years ago, when a malignant tumor was discovered in her stomach, with the expectation that most or all of the stomach would be removed.

“I was so scared, especially because I was going to have to go through the surgery alone,” she says. “But somehow my faith kicked in and I truly believed everything would be all right and it was.”

The doctors, she says, used a radical new procedure that left the stomach intact.

“Sometimes,” Siders says, “the only thing keeps you going is faith.”

If she had it all to do over?

“I would still study education,” she says. “I guess I’m just a teacher at heart.”

She tells stories of her two favorite teachers: one was Mr. Lassiter, her fourth-grade teacher. She cried so hard upon leaving that she was allowed to repeat fourth grade; another was Mr. Hunt, her English teacher for two years during high school.

Mr. Hunt loved Shakespeare so much he had parties for his students on Shakespeare’s birthday; they would re-create their family shield, and dress as some

Shakespearean character for this special occasion. Her stories underscore the importance of having a few really memorable teachers throughout primary and secondary education – a fact that is not lost on Janice Siders – the perpetual teacher.

In Siders’ office is the winter issue of a magazine called “Insight into Diversity” and its lead story by Joe Santana has this pulled quote from “The 10 Laws of Career Reinvention” by Pamela Mitchell: “One job may not fully utilize all you have to offer or develop all aspects of your talent and/or network. The answer is having a portfolio career comprised of more than one role which you create for yourself via various combinations of your skills and bodies of knowledge.”

Looking at Janice Siders’ multiple careers, as well as her contributions to the community where she lives, one might say she was the role model for Ms. Mitchell, and her reinventions have paid big dividends not only to herself, but to the communities that have been fortunate to have her expertise. She is a gift not only to GSW; she is a gift to the larger community and to all who are fortunate to come into her presence. One might even hope that this career at GSW becomes Siders’ ultimate reinvention, and that she saved the best for last.



Janice Siders poses beside the marker that identifies the Georgia Southwestern State University Wheatley Administration Building, where the Human Resources Department is located.



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Roasted with the Golden Rule

by Camille Bielby

AMERICUS — It is the kind of success stories most communities only dream of. The kind Americus likes to boast of. Rightly so.

When local businessman Bill Harris visited Guatemala on a Habitat for Humanity Global Village trip, he came back with an idea brewed in philanthropic philosophy.

Harris was on a team that built a house for a small-scale coffee farmer — a campesino — that encroached on the growing area of a single plant.

“At the time we were heading into a coffee crisis,” said Tripp Pomeroy. Pomeroy is co-owner of Café Campesino and Community Roasters Importers.

“Cents were being paid for a pound of coffee,” he says.

Harris found that the Fair Trade business model had been around since the 1940s, was successful in Europe, and was beginning to gain traction in the United States.

Coffee is traded on the commodity system, meaning the conditions and expense of growing coffee have little to no influence on pricing. The Fair Trade model takes the Golden Rule approach.

Fair Trade is more than a stamp of approval. Harris found the concept of making a conscious choice to care about and act on more than a low price or modern convenience consistent with his personal beliefs. Connecting directly to coffee growers helped Harris learn about the many factors involved in the growing and import process. His entrepreneurial spirit and analytical experience led him to test the concept by importing a single container of coffee.

The crop-to-cup process has many implications for the environment, the economic conditions and social justice systems of the world. Harris realized that a community’s daily consumption habits could help raise a family out of poverty, add years to the life of a farmer, help educate children and build infrastructure in disadvantaged communities.

Pomeroy explained that “the vast majority of coffee farmers live on less than 10 acres — many of those on three to five acres. A small landholder can’t make enough money to live on” with prices set by the commodity market.

Coffee prices are set in New York City based on global supply and demand. The growers are separated from the buyers by the structure of trade. Harris discovered that “individual farmers produce about five sacks of coffee per year. A single grower can’t fill a 40,000-pound container,” Pomeroy explained. “With the cooperative business



Nema Etheridge and Tripp Pomeroy after a successful tour on a windy Americus morning.

model, we can get 50 farmers and fill a container.”

Walking around the coffee house and the roastery, he explains, “The farmers can vote and own into something bigger, which offers expertise and better practices. The farmers have their own identity for their coffee, while everyone has a stake in the business. It only works with buyers who buy into ethical partnerships.”

According to Pomeroy, “Bill came up with an innovation that makes us different from a lot of the roasters in the U.S. A hundred thousand pounds will fill 12 containers. A co-op of roasters can each buy less than a container.”

The concept of pooling demand to fill containers led to the establishment of Cooperative Coffees. Café Campesino is one of the roasteries in the import co-op. Cooperative Coffees imports \$10 to \$12 million in coffee each year through a 24-member

co-op.

“Win-Win partnerships built on long term relationships deliver a more equitable opportunity for small scale farmers,” Pomeroy says.

Pomeroy insists “That’s why it works. We are not slick. Our first priority is the coffee farmer.”

What makes Cooperative Coffees and Café Campesino different are the long-term, close, friendly and mutually beneficial trading relationships at retail, import and growing levels.

“We teach financial literacy to all of our staff,” Pomeroy says. “Staff understands their role and can connect profit and loss balances with cash flow. They understand financial leadership and decision making.”

When the time came for expansion, Pomeroy and Harris turned to Americus’ diehard coffee drinkers and entrepreneurs.

“The intent was expansion funding, but the real result solidified us as a community coffee partner. Instead of competing, we are a partner,” he says.

Pomeroy gives the example of Pat’s Place providing box lunches for the SAM Shortline Excursion train riders.

“It is the whole local principle,” he says. “Our coffee comes from great people who are truly dedicated to making the world a better place.”

He says the partners are more interested in community identity than brand and image building.

“We end up on top when the farmers have a good year,” he says. “If we have less than a good year, they still have a good year. Ideally, we both have a good year.”

Café Campesino has had a loyal online customer following for over eight years.

“Visiting trading partners, interacting with customers, and connecting drinkers with partners in Mexico” is what Cooperative Coffees is all about, according to Pomeroy. “The reason that it works is that Americus is unusual. It has a lot of good people who get the golden rule.”

Pomeroy and his staff live by the philosophy of “it’s fun — that’s what life is supposed to be.”

Pomeroy and Harris understand that they “are impacting a lot of farmers. It is not huge, but it is a positive impact and makes a dent in the universe. This is what one man can do. What began as a trip to Guatemala made a dent in the world.”

Pomeroy grew up in D.C. and went to college in Boston and came to Americus in 1989, as a Habitat for Humanity volunteer.

He bartended at the Courthouse and got to be friends with Bill's brother, Lee Harris.

He introduces production manager Nancy Aparicio and production assistant Marco Del Paz in the roastery.

"Bill and I hit it off," he says. "We talked; we see eye to eye on being nice to people. It makes it so everything works."

He rattles off questions and instructions in fluid Spanish before rushing off to his next appointment.

Nema Etheridge explains the busy schedules Harris and Pomeroy keep. After all, there's more to the business than the quaint coffee house on Spring Street. Etheridge came to Café Campesino by way of Google.

That is, she Googled "Fair Trade" and the Americus coffee partnership came up. She sent an e-mail that said "I want to work for you."

The Sales and Marketing manager went to Guatemala last March.

"I had been to Latin American countries, but I had never met coffee farmers. They welcomed us into their homes and we ate at their tables. They shared their successes and the challenges of working as coffee farmers," she says.

These relationships are the foundation of Cooperative Coffees' success.

"Some of the meetings were very powerful. It is justice for the growers to know who is purchasing their coffee," she says between answering questions and organizing an event.

Everybody here wears many hats and switches them on the turn of a dime. Café Campesino offers "cuppings" of the recipes at 11 a.m. each Friday as part of the quality control process.

"We make sure each blend's recipe lives up to its profile," Etheridge explains.

The atmosphere was a little less charged outside at a picnic table under a shade tree by a dog pen. Lee Pinnell played chess with his eight-year-old daughter Sam, while five-year-old Shaw played with the dogs.

The Pinnells filled in missing pawns with roasted and raw coffee beans. The wind added to the challenge, shuffling the beans about the board. Sam was not always in agreement with her dad's replacement on the squares. "

We come here every Wednesday when I pick them up from school," Lee says.

The Pinnells enjoy smoothies and hot chocolate when he is off from his job at Clinic Drug Store.

A busy Friday morning found the staff hustling to serve locals a good start to their day. Everyone chipped in to prepare a hospitable welcome for a bus load of visitors coming for a tour of the roastery. Customers lingered around the tables and sofas using the coffee house's Wi-Fi and catching up on local news. Customers stopped off to pick up bags of coffee and enjoyed a cup on the patio while waiting for the roastery staff to prepare each order.

Etheridge and Aparicio restocked merchandise displays and set up the roastery for

coffee tasting and bean comparisons. They brought out a box of extra hair nets to add to the collection of Café Campesino caps hanging on the wall by the roastery door. Pomeroy and Etheridge greeted about 50 guests from the Georgia Organics Conference held in Columbus. The organic farmers filled the retail area of the coffee shop and gathered around the roastery.

Carla Linkous and daughters Liza and Molly Linkous-Stewart attend the conference each year as a mini-vacation. Linkous went to school at Georgia Southwestern. She graduated in 1995 with her bachelor's and in 1996 with her master's.

"It is sort of like coming home," she says.

Linkous is involved in a farm-to-school program. Eight-year-old Molly said the family is from the Piedmont Region. Six-year-old Liza smiles shyly as her mother narrowed it down to Decatur, Ga.

“...the people of Americus get what we do. We are climbing on the map mostly because of our commitment to Fair Trade. Americus is a hidden gem, a great city.”

"We drink it all the time," she says. The Linkous-Stewarts buy Café Campesino roasts at a Decatur Farmers Market booth. She has not yet visited the new location at the Sweet Auburn Market in downtown Atlanta. The girls listened attentively to Pomeroy's presentation on organic coffee growers with an alertness more often seen exhibited for a video game.

The bus tour included lunch at Koinonia, a Christian farm community that shares a life of prayer, work, study, service and fellowship. Pomeroy noted that Café Campesino was born from Koinonia and Habitat for Humanity International. He introduced his presentation by screening a news report aired recently in Columbus. The television feature concentrated on Café Campesino's commitment to Fair Trade.

Bill Harris appears on screen explaining "Our intention is when we first buy from them, we will always buy from them. It creates stability. We treat people overseas like we would want to be treated."

Harris hosts trips for his consumers "to meet the farmers and learn who grows the beans. From crop to cup, it cuts out the mid-

dle man. We love that kind of emphasis on helping people."

He echoes Pomeroy's sentiment that their company uses "business to demonstrate that you can create good in the world while being profitable."

Pomeroy thanked the organic farmers for taking time out of the conference for the day trip to Americus.

"It is an honor to talk to 50 people who get it at the same time. It is pretty fun for us," he gestures towards the staff.

"We were the weird guys down on Spring Street," he says. "Now in 2012, the people of Americus get what we do. We are climbing on the map mostly because of our commitment to Fair Trade. Americus is a hidden gem, a great city. Fifteen thousand people. It is full of wildly left and wildly right and everything in the middle. It is a town of people who get it."

Organic growers nodded their heads in agreement over cups of coffee when he talked of Café Campesino's affinity toward Georgia Organics.

"Georgia Organics was doing this before organic was cool," he says. "We like underdogs. You raised the bar a little in a country where we have suffering because of what we put in our bodies."

Pomeroy fielded thoughtful questions and explained that coffee cannot be grown here. Coffee only thrives 10 to 17 degrees around the equator.

"All of our coffee is organic from crop to cup, which was a huge change for coffee producers," he says. "In a sense, they commit to a lower yield and more work, but the market is willing to pay for it."

Interest in the burlap coffee bags brought an intriguing story from Pomeroy. The bags are offered to consumers for a contribution that is used to fund local needs or needs at the coffee's origins.

We helped get reading glasses for coffee growers," he says. "We have a large migrant population here who needed heaters. The Mennonites asked us and we chipped in. The bags are not recycled, but they are repurposed."

Pomeroy applauds Bill Harris, "an Americus native and one of the most inspiring people I know. He had a brilliant idea that began on a Global Village trip in 1998. At that time, a coffee plant yielded about a pound of coffee that sold for 35 cents. Bill wanted to connect those growers directly to the consumers."

And Harris' idea was to do so using the principles of the golden rule: fair pricing, transparent business arrangements, environmental and financial sustainability.

"Coops are paying \$3.80. They used to get \$2.50," he says.

The audience understands the equation from their own experience.

"The average grower farms two to 10 acres. But most coffee is grown on five to six acres which produces five to six bags – several hundred pounds – a year."

At harvest, the grower may have a

three- to five-mile walk from a high rural area to take their bags to brokers. Savvy brokers charged what they pleased. The farmer had to accept the broker's price. It was too costly to return home with coffee knowing the likelihood that no better price would come from another broker.

The only way to get coffee to the international market is by 40,000-pound containers. That's 250 bags of coffee.

Pomeroy described how "small scale farmer coops in Mexico helped neighbors fill a container. Capacity was developed with the help of non-governmental organizations to find international buyers for the coop. We now buy nine containers from a dozen coops who each fill part of a container. The roasters pool demand to fill containers from small scale coops on the principles of Fair Trade."

When Harris and Pomeroy were ready to expand the import business, they identified six coop roasters and built a local investment partnership.

"We now have 25 members from the Yukon to Gainesville to Austin," he says. "Worker-owned coops are doing business by the golden rule to build long-term, sustainable relationships."

Coffee prices are set on the commodity exchange.

"Direct relationships offer a way to price coffee based on the farmers' cost of doing business," he says. "Trading directly with the coop mitigates the risk to farmers and roasters through long-term, interdependent relationships based on transparency."

Price structures start with the U.S. stock report, adjust for the fair trade premium, the organic premium and a differential factor

that is based on the grower's reputation. This builds the price the partner needs to pay the coop in order to sustain its members.

But Fair Trade operates in the free market economy.

"If the middle man offers a lower price, it can affect the entire balance," Pomeroy says. "You have to stay ahead of the local brokers."

The strength of the coop is that it pays farmers enough to forestall the local broker's ability to take advantage of the growers.

"We choose the people we want to work with and test the relationships over time," he says.

When Cooperative Coffees considers a new grower coop, they visit the community, meet the leaders and take coffee back to test and sample.

"Members agree to support the farmer and commit to buying the coffee for a year," Pomeroy said. "If it is successful, we continue purchasing from them for six to 10 years."

The shelf life of a bean is like any other dry grain. It is good forever, but moisture decreases over the course of a year. Ideally the beans are sold in the first few months after harvest. It takes 30 to 60 days from harvest to import.

"Relationships are based on an understanding of the origin, seeing the harvest and working with others," Pomeroy says. "All organic certified partners and processing facilities face the yield challenge. Organic processes produce less than half the yield of conventional methods."

Pomeroy finds agreement from the organic growers.

"It is an important conversation to



Amanda Borden of Tallassee, Ala., had never grown a tomato before she became an organic farmer three years ago.

have," he says. "You have to pay enough of a premium to support transitional farmers who are leaving behind high yields and hoping for sustainability in four years."

Guests donned caps and hairnets for the roastery tour where Aparicio and Del Paz demonstrated the process of blowing off the shells, sorting the beans and roasting the various recipes that are sold under the Café Campesino label.

Amanda and Lee Borden of Tallassee, Ala., grow organic fruit and vegetables on a farm northeast of Montgomery. This is their first time attending the organics conference. She took early retirement from Stanford University in Birmingham.

"We wanted to live in the country and grow our food," she explained while sniffing bowls of coffee. "I am convinced that our food chain will become more difficult and expensive to support. Ecological sustainability is possible for subsistence farmers. We take too many toxins into our bodies."

The Bordens grow for themselves and their friends and neighbors but do not sell to the public.

Georgia Organics' volunteer tour guide, Craig Gilbert, began the arduous task of luring guests away from the retail coffee house to reload the bus and keep the schedule. His patience was tested as his riders gathered around Etheridge and Pomeroy, who continued conversing with passengers as they reluctantly lined up to embark for their Koinonia luncheon.

Amanda Borden says, "Three years ago neither of us had ever grown so much as a tomato. You can learn!"

She laughs and waves as they board the tour bus.

Etheridge and Pomeroy continue smiling as the bus full of people who get it leave the coffee shop.

But not for long. Pomeroy rushes off to another meeting while Etheridge and Aparicio get back to roasting and selling the best coffee in Americus.



Nancy Aparicio prepares the beans for the roasting process.

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We've combined expert care with privacy, luxury and comfort for an experience as special as the new life you are bringing into the world.

Luxurious, Private Birthing Suites

Advanced medical technologies are cleverly stored in luxurious, spacious and private birthing suites designed to accommodate moms from labor to delivery— and throughout their hospital stay. These state-of-the-art suites offer an advanced fetal monitoring system and comforts of home, including flat-screen television, wireless Internet and a sleeper sofa for dad.



New Partnerships.
New Facilities.
Exceptional Care.

- Private L/D/R/P suites
 - Sleeper sofa
 - Wireless Internet
 - Flat-screen TV
- Advanced centralized fetal monitoring
- Infant security
- Dedicated surgical suite
- Level II nursery
- Lactation counseling
- Birthing classes

