

July 2020

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VOL. 14, ISSUE 7

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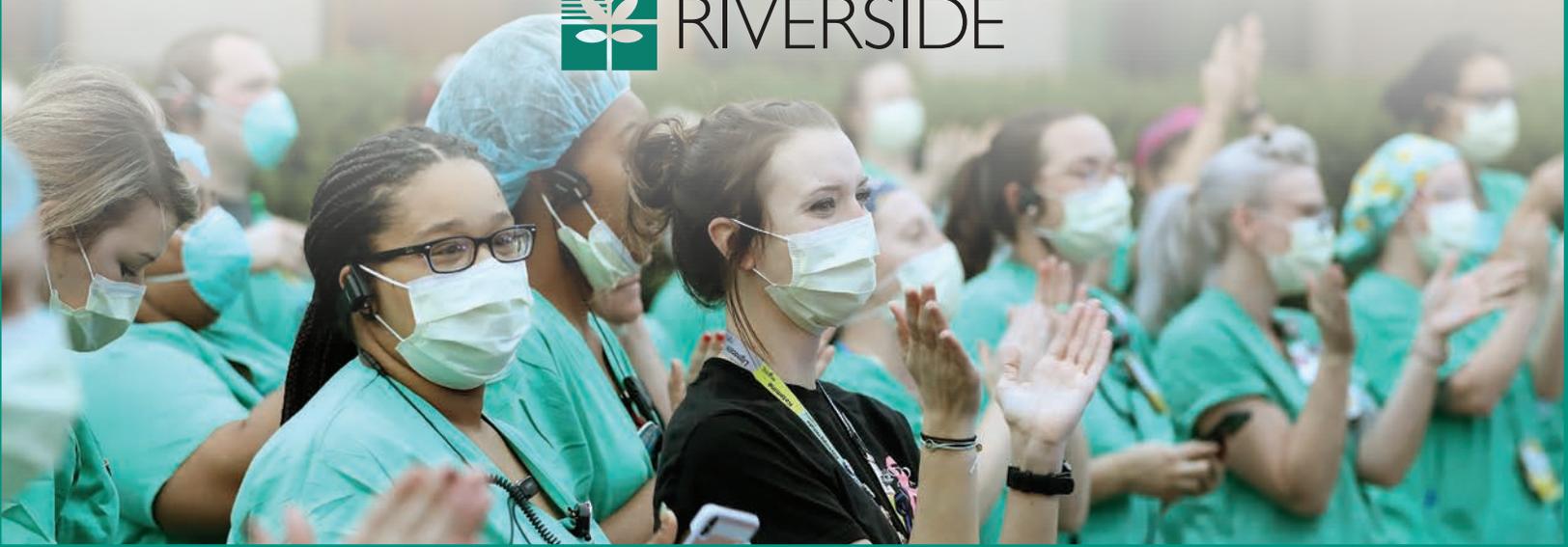
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Meredith Collins, Publisher

You know how sometimes you are planning dinner and looking in the fridge and there is a lot of this and that and leftovers in there? You just start pulling out a lot of good stuff and putting it all together and pretty sure you have put on a pretty nice dinner. (OK. For any of you who know me well, you know this is something I don't experience since Joe prepares all of our meals. But, you'll get the analogy.)

This issue is kind of like that. While we have scaled back some on the last three issues, we still had some great stories that we weren't able to include for Arts & Entertainment, Sports, Business, Home, and Health. Now we have assembled several of those features to produce a really good issue on Our Community.

The result is an interesting mix of energized and enterprising people involved in businesses and clubs and charities all over the Peninsula and some extending across the country and beyond. They represent a wide variety of interests: leadership, endurance running, writing, medicine and wellness, landscaping, and more. Another nice aspect of this collection is the age span of the people we interviewed: from high schoolers to retirees and every age in between. All in all a great group of neighbors who have been drawn to Williamsburg by its charm and now add to its charm handsomely. NDN

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# Next Door Neighbors Business



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## MORE THAN A JOB

By Alison Johnson

The large, third-floor attic in Ralph Tedeschi's childhood home contained a library built by his father. The space had floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, a center table and several comfortable chairs where Ralph and his older sister spent hours reading.

When Ralph became a father, he read to his

two young daughters every night, passing on his lifelong love of books. Now 52, he often is in the middle of four or five books at once, devouring both fiction and nonfiction.

All of that explains how a retired law enforcement officer from New England came to work as store manager at the Book Ware-

house of Williamsburg, a discount bookseller at Williamsburg Premium Outlets.

Since taking the job in August 2019, Ralph has expanded inventory and overhauled the design of the 4,000-square-foot store to make it more inviting. His goal was to build a better base of loyal local customers in addition to

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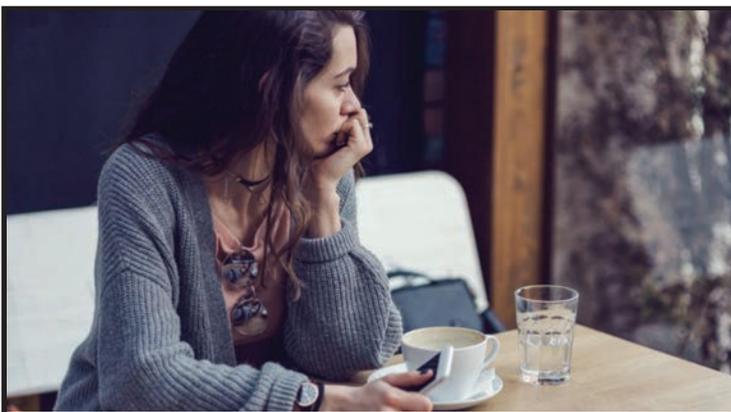




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the tourists who visit from all over the world.

“Bookstores are places where people can come to talk to each other, learn, escape and use their imaginations,” he says. “Even with all the online options, I think people still want to come into a brick and mortar store and hold a book in their hands. These stores are important to any community, and if we lose them, it will be detrimental to all of us.”

Book Warehouse of Williamsburg, part of a national chain of 42 stores, stocks roughly 25,000 to 30,000 hardcover and paperback books at any given time. To keep inventory fresh, Ralph puts in an order every other month for titles from all genres.

Books come in new from publishers and large bookstore overstocks and are sold at affordable prices, with deeper discounts for teachers and military members and bundle pricing for bigger sales. The store also carries audio books, magazines, cards, stationery and book-related gifts.

“Even though we are a smaller bookstore compared to the big box ones, we maintain an incredible and diverse selection,” Ralph says. “People find things that they haven’t been able to find anywhere else. They often can’t believe it.”

As a new manager, Ralph quickly determined that he needed to increase the percentage of sales to local residents as compared to out-of-town shoppers, a strategy that proved to be invaluable during the coronavirus pandemic when Book Warehouse had to close for two months before gradually reopening.

Ralph immediately ordered 15,000 more books, including plenty of local interest and history works. He set up more themed display tables around the store and ordered a train table, rugs and table and chair sets to decorate the children’s area, the store’s best-selling section.

“At our prices, parents can really stock up and buy a lot of books,” he notes. “We also have a lot of teachers come in to get books for their classrooms.”

Ralph also embraced special events such as story times, local author signings and fundraisers for Avalon Center, Heritage Humane Society and other area nonprofits. Rotating display tables have spotlighted holidays from Christmas and Fourth of July to National Cookbook Month and National Pet Month.

Ralph and his four booksellers, who he stresses are integral to the store’s success, focus on customer service as soon as people walk inside. Everyone gets to choose a free laminated bookmark with purchases, and kids generally score a little candy at the register.

“I love getting compliments for going out of our way to help each customer,” he says. “If they can’t find something, we try to track it down for them or suggest other routes for locating it. Even if they don’t end up buying it from us, you put the thought in the back of their minds that they should return to this store one day.”

Ralph also encourages parents to come in to read to their children, with no obligation to buy. “If kids are just staring at screens, at their phones or YouTube, everything is already imagined for them. When they read a book, they have to imagine what the characters and scenery looks like themselves, which I think is really important.”

Ralph did just that as an avid reader growing up in Warwick, Rhode Island, not far from Providence. His dad, a mason, also worked at

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the nearby Museum of Natural History and Planetarium. He kept his home library full of history books, including texts on the American Revolution and early Native Americans that Ralph believes played into his attraction to Williamsburg.

Although young Ralph loved history, too, he decided that he wanted to be a police officer. He was athletic, starting with ice hockey at age five and diving into baseball soon. He was also hooked on television crime shows such as Adam-12.

Ralph began his law enforcement career at 18, right out of high school, before the minimum age requirement for the job was raised to 21 in most states. He spent 20-plus years as a patrol officer and detective.

“I wanted to help people, and I thought it would be an exciting career,” he says. “I was right. [I] had certainly good days and bad days, but I loved it overall.”

Along the way, Ralph earned a Bachelor’s Degree in History and a Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice from Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. After he retired from law enforcement, he turned to the world

of books, becoming the manager of a Borders bookstore in Rhode Island.

In 2012, Ralph visited Williamsburg on vacation and fell in love with the area’s beauty and rich history. By 2014, he had moved here permanently. His daughters Deanna, 28, and Molly, 26, still live in the New England area.

Before starting at Book Warehouse, Ralph worked in Williamsburg as assistant manager of a since-closed Books-A-Million store and as manager of Habitat for Humanity ReStore, a nonprofit home improvement and donations center.

“After experiencing both large and small stores, I feel the smaller ones are best,” he says. “The atmosphere is cozier and more comfortable, and I like to be able to interact with the customers at a greater level.”

Indeed, Ralph loves talking to regular local customers and tourists alike. One of the best compliments he’s received was when a visitor from England told him Book Warehouse reminded her of a small bookstore back in London.

“We have the word ‘warehouse’ in our title, but it’s nothing like that,” Ralph says. “It’s

a fun and friendly place, and I find it really satisfying to help so many different types of people find the book they are looking to buy.”

When Ralph isn’t working or reading at home, he enjoys traveling, photography and sports. He particularly likes to shoot portraits of landscapes and architecture and soon plans to scout interesting, out-of-the-way locations in Virginia, perhaps abandoned old houses.

As for sports, Ralph is a “die-hard fan” of almost every Boston team, especially the Red Sox and Bruins. The glaring exception is the New England Patriots, which Ralph passed over for his mother’s favorite team, the Pittsburgh Steelers, quarterback Terry Bradshaw was an early idol.

A year into his post at Williamsburg Book Warehouse, Ralph Tedeschi is proud that the location now consistently ranks in the chain’s top five nationally for sales. This summer, he is eager to get back up to speed after the COVID-19 closure, albeit while following health guidelines. “The store is such a nice, peaceful place to come to work every day, and you feel like you’re making a difference to people,” he says. “I don’t even think of this as a job.” NDN



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# Happy Trails

By Wheston Chancellor Grove

What do people do when they have a sedentary day job and crave physical exercise? When Ellen Alexander faced this dilemma, she identified her passion, created an outlet for it and stayed the course. Ellen loves running. Even though she's completed her fair share of ultramarathons and enjoys the runner's high, she is not about counting miles.

"I started when I was in middle school because I wasn't good at any of the ball sports." She ran with a friend and then the activity continued into high school. "I ran my first marathon in college."

When Ellen turned 40, she decided to tack-

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le an ultramarathon. Tired of road races and the competitive vibe she felt from other people in shorter runs, she wanted something as she says, “kind of relaxing.” But an ultramarathon? Relaxing? As Ellen explains, it’s a mindset. The mental training is just as demanding as the physical aspect. A 50k (31 miles) is the first level of an ultramarathon. Ellen completed 40 miles for her 40th birthday. “I realized then that I was hooked!”

With shorter distances, runners may be focused on time and pacing and not interested in talking or taking breaks at the water stations. With the extended ultramarathon, the focus shifts to enjoying the process, absorbing scenery, and reaching the finish line, regardless of time. Ellen also participates in 24-hour races. Once she discovered how much joy the activity gave her, she decided to start organizing local runs in Williamsburg.

Having grown up in the Richmond area, Ellen eventually relocated to Annapolis. Tired of the grind and putting in crazy long hours, she moved to Williamsburg in 2004. By day she is a flower wholesaler. Flowers have always been a part of Ellen’s life.

“When I was sixteen, I started as a florist in a grocery store. I’ve worked in pretty much every aspect of flowers for 33 years.”

They are her professional mainstay. For a number of years, Ellen worked with James City County (JCC) Parks and Recreation. She left on good terms and returned to the colorful arrangements of a flower buyer. Ellen is the middleman when it comes to placing the on-line orders and contacting suppliers, but ideally, she would prefer organizing races full time. As a compromise, a happy meeting ground between passion and practicality, Ellen started her own side business, Happy Cat Events.

While Working for JCC Parks and Recreation, she hosted several races and was fortunate to have free reign. Over the years and after many activities, starting something independently seemed the next best thing. “I have been an ultrarunner for about seven years, and the 24-hour race is my favorite challenge. My best athletic quality is perseverance. I was not born with speed. I train with CrossFit, plus I love the rowing machine and kayaking.” One perk of working from home is being able to paddle out on her break as she lives along Little

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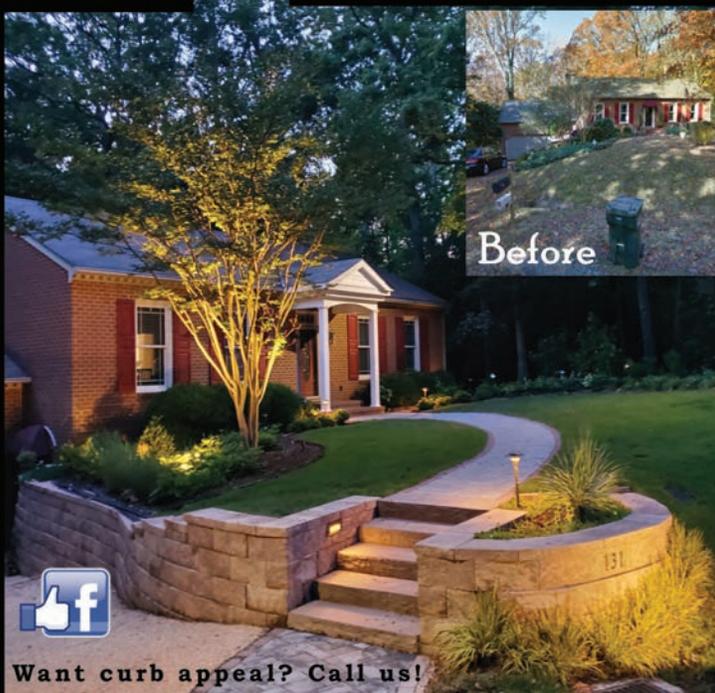
Currently, Ellen offers about six different types of races. The Night Owl 9k is scheduled for July at Freedom Park. The first official race hosted by Happy Cat Events took place in 2019. However, the first year for the actual Singletrack Maniac 50k was in 2012 when Ellen partnered with JCC. If not for the pandemic, this would have been the eighth year for the 50k.

Happy Cat Events is centered around enjoying life. It was partially inspired by Ellen’s two cats, Alfie and Bruce Wayne. Ellen declares, “Cats are the smart ones, all along.” During quarantine, she has aspired to be more like them in the way they watch and notice everything going on around them and simply take pleasure in the day. On her website is a yin and yang graphic of two cats which speaks to the mindset of balance.

There are many ways to look at an activity that may seem like a chore. “First, come up with an activity you can do with a friend. This offers accountability, either in a walking group or some sort of beginner’s fitness class. Something where you are expected to show up.”

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Sharing in an activity is helpful for camaraderie even when the experience is subjective. Ellen also recommends devising an incentive. She, too, has trouble motivating herself to work out at times. As someone who appreciates a good read, she decided she would get to listen to the next chapter in her audiobook only while exercising or after completing a session of jogging. This mindset of a reward is critical and useful for maintaining an exercise routine. Another great way to gently get involved is to start volunteering at the races.

“I think it brings home that you don’t have to be some super-fit person to participate. Come out, even to the 50K, and you’ll see people of all fitness levels, some of whom are walking the whole thing. It really makes people realize ‘I don’t need to be intimidated by this.’ It’s encouraging to see others pushing themselves to the limit, and they’re happy when they finish, so proud of themselves. It’s a real eye opener.”

As any runner knows, mental training is more demanding than the physical preparedness. “It’s a vast topic and one reason I started doing CrossFit when I started the ultramarathon. I believe that CrossFit training is so important, especially as we age.” Although Cross-

Fit is criticized by some, it is a big piece of the mental component where exercise is concerned. “Many of the workouts are daunting, and they seem so hard. But if you break them down and modify them to your ability, you’ll find that you really can do them.” Overcoming the mental block is key to tackling physical demands. “CrossFit empowers me to be able to do other things, even related to my job.”

She also understands that different exercises are essential for keeping the body in healthy form. Just moving in one plane is not beneficial, overall. The body “needs to start moving in other directions, like laterally, to strengthen up your hips and other muscle groups to prevent injury.” Ellen teaches different maneuvers in her classes and tries to encourage long-distance runners to work other muscles.

“When I was training for the ultramarathon, I did a 24-hour race, and I covered 90 miles in the race, even though I was only running about 20 miles a week in training. So, most of the preparation was mental. There will be physical pain and times when you want to quit.” If you can break the goal or task into increments, which are manageable, then little by little another mile is gained.

An ultramarathon truly is a test of endurance and not for everyone. Ellen likes the shorter races as well, like eight mile runs. “My goal is for people to leave that race and feel they’ve really accomplished something and can do anything. The mental part of it is key going in but should be even stronger coming out [of the race].”

The aspect Ellen Alexander loves most about living in Williamsburg is the green spaces. “We have so many wonderful parks! Not just here, but in Yorktown. And Richmond is close by. I don’t know if people realize how good we have it.” As an introvert, she loves the trails and quietude. Ellen teaches her classes at Williamsburg Indoor Sports Complex (WISC). They are all adaptable to the various levels of each person’s fitness goals.

“People do get intimidated. Taking that first step is the hardest, but once you come to a class or go to a race, you see it’s a great community of people. Everyone is welcoming and doing their own thing.” The word ‘race’ may deter some individuals, but the race exists in that person’s mind.

“The only competition is between you and the goals you set for yourself.” NDN

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# Making the World a Better Place

By Doug Hickerson

Jim Thompson refers to himself as “Rugby Jim” for his business and on his website. According to his website he is, “A retired gentleman of a certain age; okay, an ‘old man.’”

According to Jim, his goal is to make the world a better place. A corporate man in the auto industry for decades, he shuns being a “joiner,” as he avoids the corporate structure of any organization, even charitable ones.

When asked what he thinks is wrong with the world, he says, “War, health crises, poverty, suffering to name a few.” His words are

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tinely as the world is currently facing a coronavirus epidemic.

In his younger years, he says, “I had Walter-Mitty-like dreams of doing something noble and heroic.” Instead, he now works making rag rugs with his wife, Connie, an accomplished quilter.

Jim says he has found something he likes to do, something that helps other people; something he can do alone on his couch while listening to wonderful music and drinking coffee and only occasionally arguing with himself. And, he says, “Making rugs is something I might still be able to do in my 90s, should I last that long.”

He gets joy in making rugs as well as selling the rugs and donating the proceeds to charities. “First, it is just the process of creating something,” he says. “People who make things with their hands seem to find a certain contentment with what they do. We all work awfully hard to pay for things we can’t see: electricity, heat, insurance and taxes. It’s nice to be able to see the product of our work.”

There is a distinction to be made between the processes of crocheting rugs, which Jim does, and weaving rugs. “The difference is that to weave, you need a loom and an entirely different set of skills to make the rugs. I have some friends who make woven rugs, and they are beautiful. I, on the other hand, crochet rugs. Making the ‘rug yarn’ or the balls of one-inch-wide material strips is probably the hardest part of the process.”

The crocheting requires one stitch, the single crochet stitch. It is possible to make fancier stitches, he says, but to make rugs, the simple, single crochet stitch is all that is needed. Describing a possible one-thousand stitches in each rug, he says some might find repeating a stitch boring. “But one gets in a zone doing it, and the rug is taking shape right before your eyes. It’s a kind of Zen experience. It clears the mind.”

One aspect of his creation that Jim truly enjoys is experimenting with color. When he first started making rugs, he used colored pencils and a compass to begin coloring in cir-

cular patterns. He was not successful. As an artistic team, he and Connie exchange ideas of colors for her quilts and for his rugs. “More often than not, though, we follow the color choice our spouse favors,” he says. “It’s not to be nice, but because we believe the other is right.” Associating with Connie’s quilt world, Jim says his color sense has improved.

The colors of his rugs vary and can include very bright rugs with six or seven colors of the rainbow. “I also have made some very subtle rugs, too.” He has posted the rugs for sale and those previously sold on his website so people can get an idea of what he does. Some of the rugs, such as the Rugby Rainbow, have, predictably, all the colors of the rainbow. Others have only two or three colors. All, however, share a common theme of beauty and texture.

All proceeds from each purchase are given to a charity. “I give 100 percent of the \$25 I charge for each rug to either Doctors Without Borders or to Operation Smile, two fantastic medical charities,” Jim says. “I have made nearly \$2,000 for these charities.” He admires

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He also donates to Operation Smile to help provide cleft-palate operations on children. Also, in the near future, he plans to donate to The Foundation for Sustainable Forests. Jim's business is a cash or check only business. In this way, he can turn around and simply hand the funds to the charity. He foots the bill for out-of-pocket expenses such as materials and labor.

With an MBA from the University of Michigan, Jim had previously worked for 14 years with General Motors, reaching the position of Personnel Director of the Buick-Oldsmobile-Cadillac Headquarters at the GM Technical Center in Michigan.

His last assignment with GM was a two-

year stint at NUMMI, a joint GM-Toyota venture. Toyota wanted to get a foothold into manufacturing in this country, and GM wanted to see the famous Toyota Production System in action.

Next, he served one year as VP in a large automotive muffler supplier. He left and wrote a few small books on how to apply the Toyota Production system to office environments.

Prior to that, he had been a high school counselor, with a Master's degree specializing in Education Guidance Counseling. He also wrote a novel, *The Old Mission Academy*, outlining how to start up a charter school based on the Toyota system.

In retirement, Jim Thompson feels he is making a difference in our world in a subtle way. He says that working to create his rugs and then donating the proceeds to his favorite charities is a reasonable substitute for being there working hands-on.

"If I can't be Santa, I'll settle for being one of his elves," he says. NDN

## Next Door Neighbors

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Lisa W. Cumming Photography

# Helping a Community Grow Stronger

By Dawn Brotherton

Optimize your health at every age and disease stage. This isn't just a slogan for T.W. Taylor and the Williamsburg Drug Company. It's a way of life.

When T.W. graduated from Matoaca High School in Chesterfield County he had no idea what his future had in store for him. "We had ninety-three people in my graduating class, and I'm sure I graduated ninety-fourth," he

says, joking. "It just wasn't that important to me. Everybody I knew was a plumber, electrician or worked on cars. So, I started building houses."

Then some of his friends from the baseball team joined the Air Force, and he followed suit. T.W. went in as a corpsman and lived in Holland. His assignment in the Air Force was to assist physicians. He saw patients, ran his

own lab tests, and took x-rays. "I realized that the difference between me and the physicians was an education." His brother-in-law was a pharmacist, so with his encouragement, T.W. got out of the military and went to pharmacy school in Atlanta, Georgia.

When he graduated with his Bachelor of Science and Pharmacy degree from Mercer University in 1982, he worked with his broth-

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er-in-law, running one of his stores. Then he set up his own company, concentrating on high-tech in-home care utilizing ventilators and pressurized systems. “[American Homecare Equipment] was the first company in the state of Virginia to be Joint Commission accredited back in 1988,” T.W. says. Pharmacies with this accreditation meet and exceed rigorous performance standards to drive sustainable improvements in patient safety, quality and operational reliability.

In 1992, T.W. took a break from business ownership and drove race cars. He set track records at Charlotte Motor Speedway and New Hampshire International Speedway and drove his first Winston Cup Race at Talladega. He lived on a sailboat for a year and got his pilot’s license. “I’m a little too restless. I had to take a big chance on life.”

He stopped racing in 1994 and went back to work with his brother-in-law and his nephew in a compounding business. Compounding is the process of combining, mixing, or altering ingredients to create a medication tailored to the needs of an individual patient. This can be especially helpful for patients with allergies or who have trouble swallowing a tablet or capsule. “Then I just spent time raising the kids and working part time,” he says.

When T.W. got the chance to work with the previous owners of the Williamsburg Drug Company five years ago, he took it. He and his wife, Ellen, moved to Williamsburg, and after working as an employee for a few years, he eventually bought the two store locations from the owners. He has retained the storefront in McLaws Circle but moved the Monticello location to Jamestown Road, just off of Route 199, in November 2019.

The McLaws Circle store focuses on fittings for custom compression stockings, wrist, knee or neck braces, equipment needed for the bathroom, or ambulation like a rollator or a wheelchair. The Jamestown Road store focuses on supplements, blood draws, and runs urine, stool, and saliva samples. Both stores fill prescriptions and do a lot of work with CBD, or cannabidiol. “Most pharmacies focus on prescriptions. We decided about three years ago that we’re going to focus on optimizing your health at any age and any disease state,” T.W. says.

The new pharmacy has a state-of-the-art lab that is nationally accredited for compounding. “This is a standard 795 lab, which is a positive pressure lab. Then we have an 800 lab which meets the newest regulations by USP [U.S. Pharmacopeia], and a hazardous lab that is under negative pressure; it has to exchange air twelve times an hour.”

Consults are also done with customers. “We do consults with people to help them optimize their health, not by guessing, but by testing.” They run clients through a series of tests, checking for the right balance of vitamins and minerals in their system, as well as for various toxins. Pharmacists must take additional training to qualify in this area of functional medicine. The focus is on getting to the root cause of the problems, not treating the systems.

This approach also applies to animals. The Williamsburg Drug Company works closely with the veterinarians caring for the animals at Busch Gardens. “They have wolves, servals, rats, eagles, hawks, owls and more. We also do exotics like snakes and bearded dragons. When animals are sick, we take care of them.” They make the specific com-

# Your Local Real Estate Update

from the Williamsburg Association of REALTORS®



**Frank Hughes**  
President of the  
Williamsburg Association  
of Realtors®

## First, A Thank You

We want to thank all of the nurses, doctors, first responders, police & firemen for all they have done to keep us safe and healthy during these difficult times. Our gratitude is sincere and your commitment is most appreciated.

## A Perfect Storm

Clients, friends, even casual acquaintances ask if this is a good time to Buy or Sell. The answer for both is Yes. Reduced inventories mean a sellers’ market while low interest rates mean a buyers’ market. The combination could be described as a “perfect storm.”

## Local Data

A quick overview shows that homes priced between \$200,000 to \$400,000 are moving very quickly if they look good and are priced correctly. Your real estate professional is trained to assist you to address both issues. Especially encouraging is the \$600,000 to \$2,000,000 homes, which previously were very slow to recover, and are now enjoying a 50% increase thru the first four months. Home prices are increasing, in part, because of the resurgence of the higher end home sales. That is certainly good news for all sellers. The biggest challenge remains a dearth of listings which are down considerably from last year. There are some price categories with only a 2-4 inventory level which in a more balanced market would be more like a 5-6 month supply. This shortage is understandable as some potential home sellers have opted to wait until this pandemic has subsided before proceeding with the sale of their home.

## Future

Looking forward, Real Estate brokerages and agents agree there is a “pent up” demand by both buyers & sellers and we expect a very “robust” late summer & fall selling season. A little different from the norm but coming nonetheless.

## Your Safety First

Regardless of a health pandemic, such as we share today, there will always be clients that need to buy or sell and our REALTORS® are there for them. Precautions have been taken, masks, booties, sanitizers etc. and sellers have opened drawers and closets to minimize the possibility of contamination. Our REALTORS® have accepted this risk and continue to fulfill their buyer/seller client commitments. I applaud them for their innovation & courage as our community emerges from this COVID 19 challenge.

## Real Estate Sales & Our Community

A strong real estate market is crucial to a successful economic recovery. The number of businesses & products that are “touched” by a purchase or sale are often overlooked. For example appliances, paint, hardware, drapes, lawn equipment, and flooring to name a few.

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pounds needed at their Jamestown Road location. T.W. also works with a local dog rescue to ensure the health of those animals before they are placed in a home.

T.W. speaks nationally on pharmacy and health-related topics, specializing in integrative medicine and CBD. He trains other pharmacists on the approach he has taken within his stores to help his clients and conducts outreach through his podcasts and monthly Williamsburg Drug Talks to educate the community.

The use of CBD is on the rise, and T.W. has researched the studies and the various effectiveness of the hemp extract. He has found multiple benefits across a spectrum of diseases and ailments. In the 1990s, Dr. Raphael McCollum discovered that humans have an endocannabinoid system, meaning bodies naturally produce CBD. “By up-regulating that system by having a healthier diet, it helps everything, because we have those receptor sites in every part of your body, your brain, your skin, and your intestines,” T.W. says. Just as medical professionals recommend vitamin supplements to offset what our diets are lacking, CBD must also be considered.

T.W. uses the analogy of picking up a stick. “When you pick up a stick, you pick up both ends. So when you touch any of this stuff, you’re always touching something else. When you’re trying to dose somebody with supplements, it’s about the Goldilocks thing: not too much and not too little, just right.”

The pharmacists at the Williamsburg Drug Company run tests to find the underlying cause of a symptom. They then take the time to help a patient understand what to do with the information presented, what it means, and how it relates to what they are feeling or the medications they take or symptoms they have. The next step is then to help them fix the imbalance the tests identify.

“It’s rewarding because you’re actually helping patients. You’re not just saying, ‘here’s a drug and because you’re taking that one, here’s another one, and because you’re taking that one, here’s another one.’”

Even outside of the pharmacy, T.W. stays busy. He has been appointed by two governors to the Virginia State University Board of Visitors, serving as Vice Rector and Chair of Finance and Audit. He is a spokesman for The Children’s Miracle Network and volunteers on 12 different hospice teams.

Although he doesn’t race cars anymore, T.W. retains his single engine, multi-engine and multi-instrument pilot ratings and flies regularly. He enjoys working out and spending time with his three sons when he gets the chance. One is an engineer and the other two are in college. Ellen has two sons and a daughter. When he and Ellen started dating ten years ago, the kids told them, “Y’all need to get yourselves together, because we are a family.”

And that’s how T.W. Taylor treats the people who come into his stores. Everyone is family. T.W. and Ellen settled in Williamsburg because they love the community, and they found it was a great place to raise kids. “It’s a fun place, and it has everything you need and great people.”

T.W. believes in helping this community grow stronger. “Our job is to optimize your health. It’s just that simple.” NDN

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# A Home in Williamsburg

By Paige Brotherton



Debbie Dean Photography

We take pride in our Williamsburg community as a welcoming hub of international tourists and a safe home for lifetime locals. Whether we live in the center or on the edge of town, our neighbors make our city the friendly place it is. Worranittha Hukhan, or Mild, pronounced “My”, is an international exchange student from Thailand here to study for one year. Through the International Exchange Program, Mild has found a second home in our community as she explores the world.

Mild attended Warhill High School before the pandemic, taking courses in everything from U.S. government to biomedical science. At sixteen, Mild is a sophomore, like her host sister, but the busy high school building is new to her.

“In Thailand, we have six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. Technically, I’m just entering high school.” Through homecoming, spirit weeks, and Halloween festivals, she has discovered the dynamic world of an American student. She notes that many aspects of school in Williamsburg are different, even just in academics. “We often stay in the same classroom with just a small group of the same students, so we get very close,” Mild says. “And we don’t mix seniors and freshmen, we’re all the same

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grade.”

She mentions getting to choose what classes she was planning to take at Warhill this year and being surprised with all the individual choices.

“None of us can choose what we want to learn,” she says of her school in Thailand, where all the students take the same core classes. However, there is one aspect of decision-making back home that allows for an early orientation to future career and life goals. “There are three majors we can choose from. There’s math and science, math and English, or English and another language.” Each major has a certain set of classes for each group of students to take, with plenty of overlap between the disciplines. In Williamsburg, students choose their classes for each semester. While they cover the necessary math, science, and English courses, students can choose from an array of electives. Mild chose courses like computer science and multimedia design, catering to her specific interests.

She’s found some of the educational differences nice, like getting to move from one classroom to another throughout the day, though

she admits it’s pretty easy for her.

“I’m lucky because all my classes are on one side of the building.” Even the location of a student’s school is determined differently. “Here I heard you go to school by where you live, but it’s not like that in Thailand. You choose the school where you want to go, then you take a test.”

If you get a good enough score on the particular school’s test, you can go to your top choice. Thus, students may be grouped together by interests and aptitudes rather than simply neighborhoods.

Outside of academics, Mild has been exploring the many extracurricular activities offered at Warhill. In Thailand, clubs were required for all students as one of the periods in an average day. Throughout middle school, Mild tried cooking, knitting, and other activities as she searched for her interests. Here in America, she was a part of the Coding Club and the Chess Club.

“When spring sports started, I joined tennis,” Mild says. “At first, I was kind of nervous. Everyone there already knew what to do. I was

scared, but I decided to join it anyway, and I had fun!”

Not all of the changes have been so welcome, however. When it comes to school mornings, Williamsburg’s day begins a little sooner than she was used to. “Warhill starts so early! It starts at 7:15, and I think that’s so early!” Mild says with a smile. At home, her school doesn’t start until 8:15 but they have to arrive at 7:45, and they are similarly strict with their tardy policy. “At my school in Thailand, they have a gate and a finger scan that you use to get in. One time I arrived at school at 7:45... point eight seconds, so I was technically late.”

In many ways, her school in Thailand was stricter on several fronts. Wearing uniforms and using a school-issued backpack were commonplace at home, while in Williamsburg, public schools are more relaxed with student dress. The teachers are also often less stringent than the ones in Thailand. “They’re more casual to students,” Mild says. “We don’t usually say just ‘hi’ to a teacher, but every day our teacher at Warhill will stand outside the class and say ‘Hi,

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Beyond school, Mild has noticed even more differences from her home. “In Thailand, they say we have two seasons,” she says, though she doesn’t feel much of a difference. “They call it winter, but we don’t have snow. The coolest temperature is what you get here in the morning in summer.” Even after one of our warmest winters, Williamsburg offers quite a temperature disparity between seasons.

Some differences aren’t unique to just Williamsburg and seem to apply across the country. “One time, we went to a shopping mall, and a guy walked by and my friend said, ‘oh, I like your hat!’ and I was thinking that’s kind of weird.” Mild laughs. “We don’t talk to strangers in Thailand. I think that’s just American.”

Although she’s sixteen, Mild doesn’t have her license yet. “Even if we have a license, we aren’t allowed to drive to school. I took the SkyTram to school.” Or sometimes if she wakes up late, Mild will take an Uber motorcycle through her home city. Since she lives in the bustling capital of Thailand, Bangkok, she is used to getting

around without needing a car. “Everything is in walking distance,” Mild says. Transportation, teachers, and talking to strangers are just the beginning of her experiencing the new culture in America.

Mild knew it would be a big change coming to Williamsburg, but she’s had plenty of support throughout the process from the International Exchange Program. She entered the program by taking a test when she was still in middle school. Although Mild left for America in the fall of 2019, she only found out for certain that she’d be spending two semesters abroad in the middle of 2018.

“I got to choose between Canada and America,” Mild says. “I didn’t even know where in the United States I would be until April.” The International Exchange Program team set her up with her host family and provided her with her contacts within the program should she need help adjusting.

Every month, the program hosts get-togethers with activities for all of the exchange students in the area to check up on their wellbeing

and share experiences. This became an outlet for Mild to become close with other teens from around the world, all having traveled far to study in Williamsburg. Meanwhile, Mild has been exploring all that the larger region has to offer with her host family, the Deans. “When I came here, my host family started watching Gilmore Girls with me,” Mild says with a smile. “I really like it.”

Though she loves her home in Thailand, Mild says she will miss Williamsburg and the friends she has made in and out of the program. She hasn’t thought too much about her higher education options, but she would consider returning to the states to attend a university. Despite the cold winters, long drives, and early mornings, she has found many things worth loving in Williamsburg.

With the International Exchange Program, we can continue to reach out and welcome new members to our community, even if they’re temporary. After all, strangers become visitors, visitors become friends, and friends become neighbors. NDN

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# Helping Others Succeed

By Dawn Brotherton



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

The potential to reduce stress and open new possibilities is the focus for Phil Pinto. He learned these valuable lessons in his personal life and is now sharing it with others through Pinto Leadership Solutions.

Phil joined the Coast Guard when he was 17 years old. He was stationed aboard the Coast Guard Cutter *Firebush* in Kodiak, Alaska, working the lights and buoys in the Aleutian chain and around Kodiak Island. "I loved the hard

work, literally. At that time, you were dragging the chain across the deck by hand. And you got to see, at the end of the day, your accomplishments. You'd bring buoys back on deck, make sure the batteries were good, make sure the lights worked, and they were painted. You got to really see the fruits of your work when you put [the buoys] out in the water," he says.

As a boatswain's mate, Phil was already leading people during his first duty assignment.

"One thing I loved about the Coast Guard is, at a low rank, you get afforded the opportunity for greater responsibility." It was the beginning of his leadership career.

While in the service, Phil took online classes from Thomas Edison State University in New Jersey. He graduated with a degree in criminal justice. "My initial goal was to become a game warden when I retired from the Coast Guard. In Oregon, you're a state trooper, and then you

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work in the game warden division.” He was looking forward to having his own boat to patrol his section of a river. As an avid outdoorsman, this appealed to him.

But then he had a conversation with a federal game warden who helped him put things in perspective. The game warden asked Phil if he really wanted to be chasing racoon hunters at two o’clock in the morning when he was 50 years old. The answer to that was a definitive no.

Phil had completed his degree in criminal justice and was thinking about getting a master’s degree in human resources but still wasn’t sure that was the right fit for him. Then he learned about coaching.

“It helps to talk about what coaching is not. It’s not therapy,” Phil says. Therapy is mostly focusing on the past to help bring people from dysfunctional to functional. Coaches take over from that point and bring people from functional to optimal. “Although we will go back in the past to figure out where certain patterns have developed, we’ll jump right back into the present and focus on the here and now and then forward focus.”

He stresses that coaches are not friends, mentors or people who have an agenda. They don’t give advice. “The power of coaching is drawing answers out from the individual. Figuring out those patterns that got them in that place and then coming up with new thoughts and beliefs that would support them moving forward,” he says. It’s also about creating an accountability structure to help the client get to where they have determined they want to be.

“Coaching is not about short-term results. It’s about, at least for me, long-term sustainability. We have to build up those different muscles in our brain that help us have long-term sustainability.” He also highlights that, after creating the mindset, it is important to exercise it to make the actions become habits.

Phil is now certified as a coach through the iPEC School of Coaching and is accredited as a Professional Certified Coach through the International Coaching Federation.

He spent the last 12 years of his 26-year Coast Guard career teaching leadership skills to young recruits and volunteers. When he became a warrant officer, he was assigned to the 5th District Northern Region’s Director of Auxiliary Office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Running operations and training for Coast Guard volunteers changed his approach to leadership. “It was the first time of my career that I couldn’t tell someone what to do,” Phil says. “It was an amazing growth opportunity for me.” Working with volunteers takes a different skill set than giving military orders.

He enjoyed the challenge so much that he took a follow-on assignment to Louisville, Kentucky, doing the same type of work. Then, he and his wife, Laura, came to Williamsburg in 2014 when Phil accepted a position at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center in Yorktown.

Phil traveled two weeks out of every month teaching leadership for the Yorktown branch of the Coast Guard Leadership Development Center. That’s when he decided he wanted to continue coaching leadership as his civilian career. In 2016, while he was still on active duty, he started



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Phil Pinto Coaching, paving his way for life after the military. When he retired in 2018, he established Pinto Leadership Solutions with his wife. One of the many things he helps others with is determining what their values are and building a business around that value. “Through my coaching experience, I knew I had to design a business around the value of freedom.” He likes the idea that he can work from anywhere. “Coaching is the only profession I found that I can absolutely go in and totally just serve somebody powerfully without judgment or agenda.”

In his practice, he gives various assessments to get the client thinking about where they are and where they want to be. Phil walks the talk, continuing to push himself and his business to new heights. He is planning a leadership adventure track where he can combine his love of the outdoors with leadership training.

“The magic happens in between coaching sessions,” Phil says. “Coaching will be first thing in the morning, then we’ll go hiking or fishing or whatever outdoor activity. That will allow them to process and think and then come back to do a little more. We’ll do heavy, intensive work for a few days. That really helps accelerate growth.”

Phil also works with Fortune 100 clients and is a contract coach for the Navy senior executive service program. He is expanding his reach through other government contracts and opportunities. At the same time, he very much enjoys working with entrepreneurs.

“I create leadership programs that can help train emerging leaders, so they have the fundamentals to leadership. Then for different levels in the organization, we would have different modalities. I’m probably going to add more coaching for the senior level people. They’re going through different things, so it’s about helping them around confidence and presence and communication and motivation and trust. The reality is new level, new devil. Each level you move up in the organization, there are different things that you deal with. Even if you were amazing at your last position, your new position is going to create a lot more mindset challenges.” Phil recognizes that if he can help those leaders at the top, that goodness can filter down.

He wants to stress that coaching is not remedial. For too long, corporations were hiring coaches because someone performed poorly and this was their last chance before being fired. “I don’t take those jobs. I’m there to help and support people.” He believes in 100 percent confidentiality with the person he’s working with, even if he’s hired by another sponsor.

Phil grew up on the west coast, but when it was time to settle down, he and his wife chose to live in Williamsburg. The many hiking and biking trails give him plenty of chances to get outside. “I love being in the outdoors and doing almost anything from kayaking, fishing and hunting to hiking.” Phil also continues supporting the Coast Guard as an auxiliary member.

“I found this a very welcoming community, and I like a small-town atmosphere, even though it’s much bigger than what it looks like on the map. I like that people get together, support and help each other,” he says. Phil Pinto’s business is structured around helping others succeed, so Williamsburg is the perfect fit for him. NDN

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Lisa W. Cumming Photography

# HONORING FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN

By Kristine Hojnicky

As a spry 78-year-old, Dr. Howard “Howie” Bachman is the oldest and arguably the most educated golf cart attendant working at the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club. Howie is a member of the Long Gray Line, having graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1964. He went on to serve thirty years as an active duty armor officer, earning a master’s degree in mathematics from Rice University and a doctorate in education from Vir-

ginia Tech University along the way.

“I had a couple of visions of my retirement,” he says. “I saw an ad in the paper for the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club which is rated in the Top 100 in the nation. Apparently, as an avid golfer at the time in my 60s, I looked like I could probably do some modicum of work. What they got was a type A, timely, responsible Colonel you would run into in the Army.”

Howie and his wife of nearly fifty-seven years,

Barbara Jo “Babs” Bachman, were drawn to Williamsburg for retirement for several reasons. Their son Tod attended William & Mary at the time they retired, and they had good friends who lived in the area. The region’s geographic location and mild climate were added pluses, as was the abundance of golf courses.

“My plan was to play all the military courses. I also thought that the grandchildren would be attracted to Busch Gardens.”

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After settling in, Howie tried out several local golf clubs with the intent to play and volunteer to stay active, but was unable to find one that met his criteria.

Ultimately, this led him to what he affectionately calls “The Shoe” otherwise known as the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club at the Colonial Williamsburg Resort. The club is Williamsburg’s premier golf experience, boasting three award-winning courses. It also hosts invitational events like the Military Appreciation Tournament throughout the calendar year.

A few days a week, Howie is out on the course hauling bags of clubs, preparing carts and attending to the needs of members and guests. “I’m an outgoing individual and it’s great for me to be able to get out of the house and socialize,” he says. “It gives me exercise so that I’m in as good of shape as probably any of my West Point classmates.”

The Golden Horseshoe has also served as a convergence point for the charitable fundraising work Howie does with Folds of Honor, a non-profit with chapters in all fifty states that provide educational scholarships up to \$5,000 to the children and spouses of fallen and disabled service members. When the club announced

they were hosting a Military Appreciation Golf Tournament on the Gold Course last fall to support Folds of Honor, Howie’s passion for the event was obvious. The Golden Horseshoe raised \$13,000 in six weeks through corporate and individual sponsorships for the charity organization.

As the Chairman of the Sponsorship Program for this year’s September 14th tournament, Howie hopes to raise even more money than last year by reaching out to local military academy chapters and associations to sponsor four-person teams as well as honor fallen classmates on tournament signage.

“Last year I remembered my West Point classmate and ranger buddy who died in Vietnam by putting his name on the sign that came with my sponsorship package,” he explains. “I sent a picture of it to one of my class forums and one of the widows in my class asked if she could get a sign too. This year, if several classmates want to pool their donations to sponsor a sign at the tournament, they have the opportunity to put multiple names on one.”

Howie’s sense of duty to serve started back when he was a child. A pre-World War II baby, he remembers when the troops were welcomed

home, including his father who served in the U.S. Navy during the war.

“It got me thinking about going to Annapolis, so in eighth grade I sat down with my mom and we talked about what I had to take in high school in order to get in,” he says. “I was a decent student, and I was on the football team when football was everything in Toledo, Ohio.” But when the Annapolis football coaches passed on the opportunity to recruit Howie during their visit to his high school, he considered applying to West Point instead.

“I was never good enough to play at West Point but I went with the belief that I could probably compete,” he says. “I had been an Eagle Scout and liked structure. All of that sent me in the direction of West Point. I was fortunate enough to get in, but my West Point career was checkered at best.”

After graduation, Howie went on to Army Ranger School and took command of his first armor platoon with 1-14 ACR following New Year’s 1965 on the parade ground in Fulda, Germany. The following thirty years would take Howie on tours of duty in West Germany, Vietnam, West Point, Fort Hood, Fort Polk and the Pentagon.



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But he says his favorite assignment was serving as a battalion commander with the 3rd Battalion 33rd Armor at what was nicknamed “the Rock” in Kirsch-Göns, Germany.

“I remember being out there on a cold winter’s morning after running with one of my companies, and I said to myself, I’m a battalion commander, it will never get any better than this. And it didn’t,” he says.

Following his active duty service as a commander of a tank-heavy Brigade, Howie serendipitously found a second career working in the education field. Over a round of golf, a friend offered him the position of Superintendent for Scotland School for Veterans’ Children in Pennsylvania. It was an opportunity to apply his doctoral studies, and he was passionate about educating the children of veterans. He served in the role for several years before retiring to Williamsburg.

Not one to stay stagnant, Howie took a part-time role at Thomas Nelson Community College. Because of his past military service, the school asked if he would take on the responsibility of a three-week mathematics refresher course geared toward Navy enlisted corpsmen who were enrolled in the college’s pharmaceuti-

cal assistant program.

“Sadly, the program went away,” he says. “What I miss most about teaching is seeing the light go on. I can teach math to anybody, particularly to people who have absolutely convinced themselves over the years that they can’t do it.”

Throughout both his military and civilian careers, and now in retirement, Howie’s wife Babs has stood by his side as “a terribly supportive army wife.” They met on a blind date after Howie graduated from West Point. They dated for three weeks before he left for Ranger School and while he was away, he ordered an engagement ring and proposed to her the next time he returned home. They were married immediately and left for Germany.

Three summers ago, Howie and Babs had an opportunity to relive their first assignment and the time they spent at “the Rock” on a family vacation to Germany. They took their son and his wife, and their daughter Jo and her four children back to the Fulda Gap and had a memorable trip during which Howie shared his experience serving as a young armor officer.

“We went into the museum and I’m getting goosebumps now telling you this. Sitting in the museum is a jeep with my bumper numbers on

it, C-36 1/14 ACR,” he says. “I talked to the kids about what it was like to look across the East German border at the bad guys on a daily basis. I know that everyone was deeply moved and appreciative of that particular visit. That was pretty special.”

Today, the Bachmans remain active in the Williamsburg community, particularly by cheering on Army football during the fall at Saturday afternoon watch-parties hosted by the local chapter of the West Point Society. Of course, Howie stays busy playing rounds of golf at the Golden Horseshoe in between his shifts as a cart attendant and remains extremely dedicated to his charitable work.

“The bottom-line reason for my charity work and why I am so passionate about it is I had a very successful army career. I was a civilian kid who wandered into West Point. I had an awful lot of guys in Fulda, Germany who supported me when I didn’t know anything about being a second lieutenant. Guys were put in harm’s way under my orders in Vietnam, and others supported me in other trying times,” he says. Dr. Howard “Howie” Bachman is passionate about giving back to the troops. “This is a way for me to do that.” NDN



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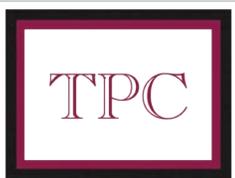
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Lisa W. Cumming Photography

# Creating New Worlds

By Brandy Centolanza

Christopher Russell has combined his love of reading, writing, science, magic and video games in his first novel, a fantasy tale scheduled to be published this fall.

“Divinity’s Twilight: Rebirth” is the first in a series of books Christopher has created focus-

ing on war and conflict involving three brothers, Darmatus and Rabban Aurelian and their older brother, Sarcon, and other characters in the fictionalized world of Lozaria. The ebook for “Divinity’s Twilight: Rebirth” is available in June while hard copies of the book will be on

sale starting in September.

“My mother is an English teacher, so I grew up writing on the side,” Christopher says. “I’ve always enjoyed writing.”

Christopher, an only child, traveled the country and the world with his parents as a kid



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while his father served in the U.S. Army. A word enthusiast from a young age, Christopher competed in spelling bee contests all throughout elementary school, at one point ranking 10th best speller in Europe and later fourth best speller in Pennsylvania. While stationed in Germany in the fourth grade, Christopher penned one of his first stories, a nature piece about the adventures of animals under the sea, for a writing competition. After winning the school's contest, he was invited to an intensive writing training program, where he met other authors and learned more about the craft.

Christopher also developed a love of fantasy and science fiction as a child, starting with The Redwall book series, a collection of children's fantasy novels about talking animals by British author Brian Jacques.

"I found it tantalizing," Christopher says. "I was also fascinated with 'The Lord of The Rings' and 'Star Wars.' I was instantly riveted by 'Star Wars' and started reading all the books."

In 2003, Christopher and his mother, Darlene, and father, Marvin, settled in Williamsburg, where he attended high school at Warhill High. In ninth grade, his love of writing was amplified as well as his interest in video games and in history, particularly Greek and Roman history. Thanks to support and encouragement from his English teachers, he later wrote a story called "First Legion" for his senior high school honors project about what would have happened if Julius Caesar had survived his assassination.

During high school, Christopher balanced writing with many extra-curricular activities including football, band, taekwondo, Model UN, student council and National Honor Society. After graduating in 2010 as class valedictorian, Christopher decided to attend the University of Virginia. Though he majored in mechanical engineering and aerospace engineering, reading and writing were never far from his mind.

Christopher was drawn to a series of fantasy and science fiction books by Adrian Tchaikovsky called "Shadows of the Apt" during his sophomore year. Inspired, Christopher decided to write his own book, combining magic and fantasy with his background in science and engineering.

"What I like about fantasy is that it disconnects us from the baggage that our world has," Christopher says.

Christopher wrote the first two chapters, then set the book aside for a few years to focus on his studies. Then, during the summer of 2017, Christopher read the book "Resisting Happiness" by Matthew Kelly and decided to quit stalling on his dream of becoming a published author.

"I told myself I was done procrastinating and that I needed to say yes," Christopher says. "I began writing again in earnest and became really invested in it. I found out I really enjoy writing and coming up with these stories."

Christopher completed his first novel in nine months. After revising, trimming and reorganizing the story, he set about finding a publisher. In 2019, he sent out multiple queries and was pleasantly surprised when "Divinity's Twilight: Rebirth" was accepted by the first publisher he met, Morgan James Publishing, which has a branch office in nearby Norfolk, Virginia.

"It was a little surreal," Christopher says.



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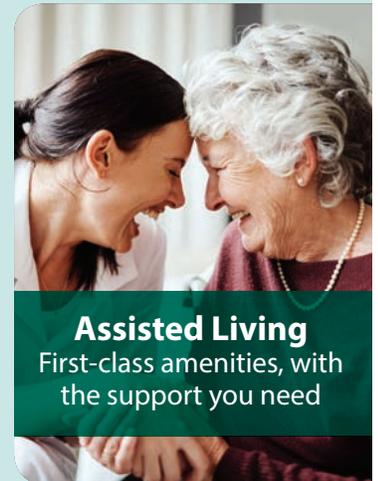
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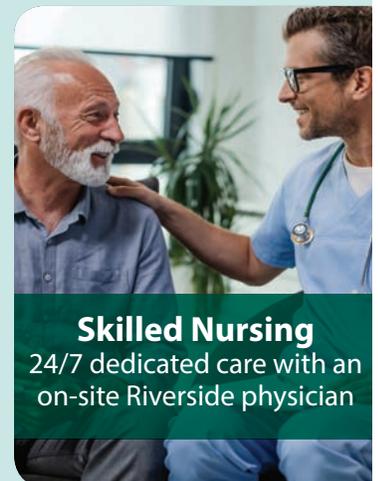
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Elements of his book are drawn from various personal influences and experiences. Christopher intertwines technology and magic with physics, chemistry and biology. Characters are based on his imagination as well as those in real life. He also incorporates his knowledge of taekwondo, his father's military background and his Christian faith into the story.

Christopher temporarily moved back to Williamsburg earlier this spring to hunker down with his parents following the COVID-19 outbreak and the state's stay in place mandate. While in quarantine, Christopher has been busy marketing his book and enjoying the down time with his mother and father and the family dogs, Vallen, Matteo, Meira and Maddie. Three of their pets are named after characters from Christopher's novel.

"My parents have been very supportive about my dream," Christopher says. "They were the first ones to read my book, have shared their opinions and thoughts and have helped me with my website."

Christopher has been working diligently on early reader feedback, trying to gauge how much of an emotional interest people have invested in his book and characters. In addition to promoting "Divinity's Twilight: Rebirth", Christopher has begun writing the second and third manuscripts for the book series and started a blog where he posts other short stories once a month. He's also been teaching online courses and preparing his dissertation toward a doctorate degree from UVA.

"I like to keep my mind limber," he says.

Although Christopher spends much of his free time writing, he has many other interests. He holds a third-degree black belt in taekwondo and enjoys skiing and running. He also still finds time for video games and reading.

"I like to find an hour a day to sit and read," he says. "Right now, I am reading 'The Wheel of Time' by Robert Jordan."

New Town and High Street are among his favorite places to frequent in Williamsburg when he can.

"I find Williamsburg to have wonderful spaces for living life, places where you can sample everything all at once," Christopher says. "Everyone is so friendly. I am still close with friends and teachers from high school. I have such a great support system here."

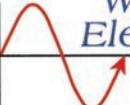
Being forced to slow down due to the coronavirus has heightened Christopher's desire to become a full-time author. He is more determined than ever to spend his days writing while perhaps working as an engineering consultant on the side.

His second and third books will come out on the heels of his debut novel, perhaps with the subsequent books dropping as early as summer 2021. Christopher Russell originally envisioned the Divinity's Twilight series as a trilogy, but now his goal is to pen it as a series of ten or more books. He is also toying with the idea of revisiting "First Legion," his high school story about Julius Caesar. Eventually, he would also like to explore other characters and worlds.

"I get as much a thrill out of writing a scene as I hope the readers do when they read it," Christopher says. "'Divinity's Twilight: Rebirth' is my pride and joy, but I also want to do other things. I want to create new characters and stories. I want to develop another universe." NDN

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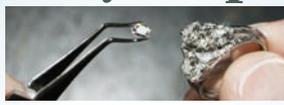


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# A Career with Purpose

By Susan Williamson

Launa Bellucci equates her health and wellness business with packing parachutes. She provides products and services that can help to improve physical, emotional and mental health, but she never knows who will use them or when they will pull the cord.

Launa describes her business by saying,

“My health and wellness business is a personal endeavor to help people live their best lives through yoga and Airbonne.” She is a 200-hour registered yoga teacher with 140 additional hours focused on trauma-sensitive yoga. She tells people that they don’t have to be flexible or skinny or wear yoga pants to do

yoga. “If you can breathe, you can do yoga.” She teaches the vinyasa style which incorporates breath with movement. “I prefer to teach slower, more gentle, restorative yoga that still challenges each person at their own level.”

Launa first explored yoga when she was nearing the end of her Air Force career and

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was considering what she wanted to do after retirement from the military. As a marathon runner, she thought about being a running coach, but knew she needed to learn more about anatomy and how the body works. When she heard about Yoga Fit for Warriors, a yoga certification focused on helping people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries, she says, “I got goosebumps.” She decided to pursue that as a career and complete the necessary certification.

Her yoga training not only prepared her for a new career but profoundly affected her personally. “It taught me body awareness and the powerful and amazing gift that it is, but more importantly, it taught me self-acceptance, self-love and self-empathy.” She completed her certification in 2018, shortly after she retired from the Air Force. She now works full time as a civilian at Langley Air Force Base, but she looks for opportunities to teach groups as well as individuals, customizing classes to their need.

The second prong of her business is as an Airbonne International Independent Consultant and District Manager. She says, “Airbonne is the Swiss word for ‘beautiful tree,’ and we are a community committed to transforming lives through plant-based ingredients in scientifically tested products.”

She learned about Airbonne in 2019 when she noticed a difference in one of her work colleagues who had been participating in the program for about six months. “I noticed how vibrant and happy she looked.” After two years of retirement from the service, Launa had stopped exercising regularly, gained weight and suffered from an ongoing undercurrent of depression. “I needed a reset. I needed what I saw in her.” She committed to try Airbonne’s 30-day Healthy Living Program which provided her with weekly grocery lists, meal plans, shake recipes, snack ideas, tips for dining out, coaching, accountability and encouragement.

“By day six, I felt incredible,” she says. “I felt like my old self again, someone I hadn’t seen in ten years.” Pants she had been avoid-

ing now fit, and her energy level soared. She committed to telling others about the program and started her Airbonne business as an accompaniment to her yoga instruction. She likes the fact that the products, which include nutritional supplements along with skin care, bath and body and cosmetic products, are all plant-based, not genetically modified and are animal friendly. She describes the company as, “A people-building, people-healing and people-empowering business.” The program aims for healthy living from the inside and out.

Launa wasn’t the only one in her family to benefit from the Airbonne lifestyle. Their son, who has lupus, was able to lose 40 pounds and reduce his medications. He has more energy and less fatigue. “My 88-year-old mother-in-law says she doesn’t have to take naps any more, her blood pressure medication has been cut in half by her doctor, she has the stamina to walk five to seven miles a day, and she’s lost 30 pounds.”

While Launa admits the results of the program are different for everyone, she says of



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her family members, “They made their health a commitment, implemented the education they were given and are very happy with the changes they’ve experienced.”

Launa grew up in Escondido, California, near San Diego. She entered the delayed-enlistment program for the US Air Force as a junior in high school and began basic training two days after graduating from high school. She chose the military because she wanted a stable career with a sense of purpose. She said it gave her not only that but an incredible husband and so much more. During her service time, she completed a bachelor’s degree in resource management and master’s degrees in business administration and operational art and science. She applied for and was accepted into the Reserve Officer Training Corps and was commissioned as an officer.

She met her husband, Will, when she was stationed in England, eight years into her service. Will had retired there after a 26-year career. He was working at the woodworking shop on base, restoring antiques and teach-

ing woodworking and stained-glass classes. Launa met him when she enrolled in one of his stained-glass classes. Her last two Air Force assignments, before coming to Virginia, were Alaska and South Dakota. When Launa was transferred to Langley Air Force Base, the couple chose to live in Williamsburg because it seemed more rural and spacious yet was still near the base.

Will is now a full-time artist, so it was important for them to live in a place with a culture and appreciation of art like Williamsburg. Launa says, “We love walking at York River State Park, riding our bike to sit on the pier at Waller Mill Park, and we are passionate about kayaking.” They enjoy living in the historic triangle and bringing their family and friends to Colonial Williamsburg. “We comment every day about how blessed we are and take every opportunity to invite people to the sanctuary we call home.”

Launa’s parachute analogy came about when she heard the story of Charlie Plumb, a Vietnam veteran fighter pilot who was shot

down on his 73rd mission. He parachuted down and was captured by the enemy, enduring six years of brutal torture and imprisonment. Years later, he and his wife went out to eat and were approached by a man who knew who he was and about his being shot down and detained as a prisoner of war. Plumb asked the man, “How in the world do I know you?”

The other man smiled and said, “Well sir, you see, I packed your parachute.”

Plumb shook his hand and thanked him for saving his life, saying he had thanked God for the man who packed his parachute.

Launa says, “My job is to pack parachutes and offer them. Some may not pull the cord on that parachute for months or even years, but some will right away. I don’t get to decide who gets the parachute and who doesn’t. My job is to pack them.”

Launa Bellucci has found a second career with purpose which will help people and might even save a life, as well as bring financial freedom and the gift of time to her husband and herself. NDN

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# Environmental Stewardship in the Heart of History

By Ashley Smith

Mitch Foos, owner of The King's Garden, a lawn and landscaping company, believes that natural spaces can profoundly affect a family's well-being, both physically and mentally. For him, every project should be more than just beautiful, it should be a sensory masterpiece. Whether building a children's garden or im-

proving the landscape at a commercial location, Mitch focuses on excellent craftsmanship to please his client but also to leave behind a space that inspires peace. Mitch and his team believe that the outdoor spaces surrounding a home have a profound impact on the psychology of the family who lives there.

This hardworking, peaceful gardener was not always such a dedicated craftsman. Mitch grew up in Gloucester. "I was sheltered but not spoiled, certainly," he states. As a student, he excelled academically but does admit to having a rebellious streak. "I was a bit of a wild guy," he says. Active in sports, Mitch played soccer and



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enjoyed being outdoors.

After high school, Mitch's stellar academics led him to attend William & Mary, where he studied hard and focused on a double major. Within six years, he had earned Bachelor of Science degrees in Religion and Psychology. Just as impressive, he was employed while in college. In between all of his classes and the requisite studying, Mitch worked for Hertzler & George, the design arm of Green Guard Inc., a local landscaping company. The owner, Joe Hertzler, taught Mitch the business, and he stayed with the company, even after his graduation in 2005. He remains grateful to Mr. Hertzler for all that he learned while working with him.

"I learned a lot from Joe, especially how to be 'lean and neat,'" he says.

However, in 2007, the economic recession hit Williamsburg and Mitch needed to change employment. "I had no savings, no money. So, I borrowed \$20,000 and started my own business." He received his class A contractor's license and became the chief estimator and

builder for his company, The King's Garden. For four years, Mitch worked 60 hours a week to provide for his family and establish a reputation for the quality and work ethic that has been the foundation of The King's Garden ever since. "Those were lean years and it was hard, but we're up to eight employees now, and I couldn't be prouder of my crew."

Over the last six years, the employees have become a family, and the strong relationship Mitch has with his crew shows in the work. Keeping in mind the lessons he learned from Mr. Hertzler, Mitch has always trimmed the overhead costs of the business, allowing him to offer quality work at a reasonable price. He runs The King's Garden on two principles.

First, that he delivers the absolute best craftsmanship he is capable of and second, that they do not cut corners. "I want the designs I create and build to last forever." They even absorb the extra cost to provide organic solutions for their clients. As owner, Mitch advocates for responsible environmental stewardship and strives to build a legacy that stands the test of time, envi-

ronmentally and professionally.

Mitch credits his family and his faith for his commitment to excellence. He met his wife, Amy, at a Bible study when he was just 22. "She is the love of my life," he avows, "and she is truly wonderful." Amy not only serves as the secretary and accountant for The King's Garden, but also homeschools their children, Mikaela and Matthu. Mitch initially rejected Christianity, and he describes himself as having been "biased against the Bible." Later, his studies at W&M led him to a deeper understanding of faith.

"I read the book of Job, and then the New Testament, and God grabbed my attention," he says.

Amy also shares Mitch's faith, and together, they actively engage others by serving within the local community and across the world. In partnership with the Smith Memorial Baptist Church of Williamsburg, the Foos family participates in mission work in Kenya, supporting local churches there and building orphanages. In Williamsburg, Mitch volunteers by leading The Good News Club, a faith-based club in

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which students are invited to learn more about their Christian faith and create a welcoming space for others. The club meets at Waller Mill Elementary School on a regular basis.

When Mitch is not serving with his faith community or creating beauty around town, he enjoys being outdoors. An avid outdoorsman, Mitch loves to spend time in the stunning natural environment that the local area has to offer. He keeps a boat at his parents' home in Gloucester and often takes it out for bass fishing trips. Once a year, he embarks upon a five-day bear hunting expedition to hunt black bear in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia. Mitch is also a marksman and practices regularly at the shooting range in Toano and occasionally on the eight acres of land surrounding his home. Like many outdoor enthusiasts, he has tried his hand at scuba diving but also enjoys spear fishing and floating down the Shenandoah from northern Virginia to Harper's Ferry, just as he did in his youth. In addition, he enjoys playing ping pong, a surprise to many people. Mitch bonds with his son over both soccer

and skateboarding. The Foos family takes every opportunity to explore the outdoors and spend time in nature.

One of the Mitch's favorite forms of exercise is bicycling around Colonial Williamsburg. His fondness for Williamsburg is rooted in the history and deep connection he feels for the entire historic triangle. "This is the cradle of freedom in our country, and I love the diversity we experience here," he says. He tells of one particularly beautiful experience that drove this home for him. One Christmas season, Mitch and his family were walking the streets of Colonial Williamsburg at dusk. The living history museum had just started to light the baskets, creating a romantic atmosphere. As the family continued to walk, they heard the faint sound of drumming coming closer. Soon, they were surrounded by the Fifes and Drums Corps of Williamsburg and a crowd of locals carrying candles as they proceeded toward the courthouse. Mitch recounts how he felt at that moment.

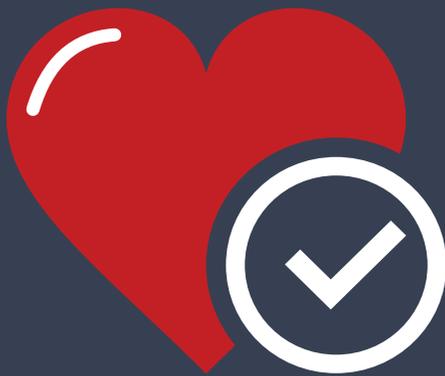
"I was transported, and at that moment, it felt as though we were riding the wave of free-

dom that led us to these United States." Mitch firmly believes that he has an obligation to avail himself and his family of the rich education that Colonial Williamsburg, Yorktown and Jamestown offer.

Though Williamsburg has their hearts, Mitch and Amy do dream about retiring elsewhere many years from now. During a summer road trip through the western United States, the family fell in love with the countryside of Wisconsin.

"The natural beauty of the land is breathtaking, and we would love to retire there when it's time." For now, though, they plan to live fully present in the place they call home. The connection to past freedom fighters and the diversity that Williamsburg experiences are unique to the area, and Mitch is grateful for the opportunity to raise his children here, in the heart of history.

His legacy of environmental stewardship and beauty will also be one of commitment, education and service for not only his children but also the historic triangle. NDN



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# shop local

(When it's approved and safe)

Local business owners are our neighbors and friends.

They are working hard to supply you with what you need. It's not just about making money.

*"Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn't matter to me. Going to bed at night saying we've done something wonderful...that's what matters to me."* - Steve Jobs

## We all need something, Doggone it!



Next Door Neighbors

*Williamsburg's*  
**IN THE  
NEIGHBORHOOD**  
photo challenge

**ROCKIN'  
PHASE II**

Pauls' Deli

Green Leaf  
Restaurant & Taphouse

College Delly

Find the 12 differences  
between the original  
photograph (top) and  
the altered photograph  
(bottom).

**Enjoy!**

**Look for the answers  
in the next issue of  
Next Door Neighbors**

JUNE 2020  
In the Neighborhood  
Photo Challenge



INTERMEDIATE





# ALWAYS HAPPY TO SERVE OUR COMMUNITY



**45 YEARDLEYS GRANT**  
3 BR • 2 BA • 2,738 sqft

Patio, 1 level home in Kingsmill  
Kitchen w/ gas cooktop, double ovens,  
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Gorgeous home w/ thoughtful improve-  
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A dream for anyone looking for room to  
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**Governor's Land**  
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Elegant Charlie Ross built golf  
front home | Great Room with  
cathedral ceiling & golf views  
Expansive culinary kitchen with  
two center islands and pantry  
Screened porch, stamped  
concrete veranda, and patio  
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sealed crawlspace | \$789,000



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**NEW TOWN**  
3 BR | 3 BA | 2,562 sqft

This townhome is located near every-  
thing New Town has to offer. Overlook-  
ing a lush walkway & green space, this  
home has an open floor plan w/ HW  
floors, kitchen w/ SS, new range, new  
microwave & pantry. 3 BRs w/ HW are  
one flight up including ensuite master.  
3rd floor has large bonus room. Freshly  
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Surround yourself w/ elegance! Grace  
& comfort blend w/ timeless design in  
meticulously maintained patio home on  
the 3rd hole of the Plantation Course.  
Soaring ceilings & filled w/ natural  
light, this home has an open floor plan  
& a gourmet kitchen w/ quartz counter-  
tops & marble tiled backsplash. One-of-  
a-kind home. Priced at \$699,900. Wow!



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