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SCOTTSVILLE, VIRGINIA

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Scottsville Monthly

Editor C.M. Santos valleyeditor1@gmail.com

Advertising Director Judi Price judi.valleypublishing@gmail.com

> **Office Manager** Edee Povol edee@fluvannareview.com

> > **Graphic Designer** Marilyn Ellinger

> > > **Staff Writers** Ronald Smith Patrick Healy

Contributors The Scottsville Museum Matt Lawless

Email: valleyeditor1@gmail.com

Photo Submissions: valleyeditor1@gmail.com

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 59, Palmyra, VA

Location: 106 Crofton Plaza, Suite 1, Palmyra, VA

Phone: (434) 591-1000 Fax: (434) 589-1704

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Julia Keys: "When I was 13 things changed!" All photos by Ron Smith

Christmas Memories -- 2019

rom time to time throughout our lives we remember, out of the blue, something that hap-pened years ago. Sometimes these memories trigger emotional responses; a laugh or a good cry. In what has become sort of a regular feature of the Scottsville Monthly's



The Cover

John-Boy's typewriter, in the writer's room at John & Olivia's Bed and Breakfast in the village of Schuyler. Photo by Patrick Healy Cover designed by Marilyn Ellinger

By Ron Smith Correspondent

December issue, we once again hear from local members of our community who have been kind enough to share

memories of past holiday seasons. Julia Keys grew up and still lives in Buckingham. She retired from the University of Virginia where she worked as a neurosurgical nurse. Julia is one of those people who seems to be happy all the time. Just being around her will make you feel better. Her patients no doubt were helped in their recovery by her positive attitude.

"Growing up with [her] family was lovely," she says. "We had plenty to eat, and always had a live tree," she contin-ued. "We would put our tree up way before Christmas so Santa could find his way," she added.

his way," she added. The family would come to Scottsville to shop. "Sometimes Mom would go to town by herself," Julia said. Her Mom told her "honey, when Santa knocks at the door you'll know that knock from anyone else's knock." There were six boys and three girls in the family and she remembers all Christmases being special until she was thirteen. That's special until she was thirteen. That's when an older brother told her "the truth (as he saw it) about Santa," she says, and added, "I have never forgiven him for that.

Today Julia has two grown children and four grandchildren. Watching them grow and experience their own Christmases has renewed her faith. She

also remembers from her days at UVA "some people would find a way to be admitted to the hospital just to have someone around for the holiday.' People who had to spend their holiday. In the hospital had their own Christmas angel. Her name is Julia.

Delores Somers is from Brooklyn, but she has lived in Scottsville almost fifty years. When she was sixteen her family built a new home on Long Island, "the Island" as it is called by many New Yorkers.

While we sometimes get a mental picture of Brooklyn as only apartments and row houses, there are many neigh-borhoods with single and multi-family

borhoods with single and multi-family homes. Delores's family owned a sin-gle-family home in a neighborhood near the Borough of Queens. J. Gilbert Somers, known as Gil, was a stain glass artist. He learned his craft from his father. During WWII a new Army base was being constructed on Long Island near the township of St. James. The base had a chapel and Somers was selected to make the stain glass windows. After completion of the glass windows. After completion of the job he was told that the tools and leftover materials were of no further use to the army so he might as well take them with him.

Although Somers was not really sure he wanted to pursue his father's trade he did so and became a well-known artist who traveled around the United



Delores (r) and daughter Stephanie (I) enjoy having family around at holiday time.

States plying his trade both in creation and repair/restoration. In 1953 he met Delores, they were married and eventually relocated to Scottsville purchasing a farm near the town.

As traditions go Gil had some definite ideas. "We went out on Christmas Eve to get our tree," Delores remembers, "and we didn't put the tree up until the children were in bed." This tradition went on for years.

were in bed." This tradition went on for years. She remembers fondly of "seeing two-year-old son Gilbert coming down the stairs on Christmas morning and seeing the fully decorated tree and presents where the night before there was nothing." With three children, Victor, Gilbert and Stephanie, traditions changed a little with each child being allowed to open one present before it was "off to bed." Then Delores would attend midnight services at St. John's Episcopal Church and always thought "the quietness of downtown Scottsville reminded her of Bethlaham "

her of Bethlehem.

Gil passed away in 2016. The children are grown and now there are grandchildren. Everyone is but a short distance away and on most Christmases the entire family is able to meet at the farm. "I still have always have those wonderful memories," Delores said, "they are one Christmas gift you never get tired of.

Trevlyn Karr, "Trev" as she is own, is from Sharon, known. Pennsylvania and has lived in Scottsville since the early '70's. She is also a retired nurse. Trev worked part time at Martha Jefferson hospital for ten years. She took a break to help her husband operate a hardware store in Scottsville then returned to nursing. Her return to work in a fulltime position at Martha Jefferson Hospital would last another thirty years. Like most people in a "service profession" she was obligated to work almost every Christmas.



Trevlyn Karr: "At Christmas it was good to know who was working in the ER!"

In order to enjoy as much of Christmas as possible, she worked the 11pm – 7am shift Christmas night. This schedule meant she could be off both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. That way she would be able to ensure Santa's visit and provide time to be with family the next day. It didn't always work out that way.

"It seemed like on Christmas Eve someone would get sick or hurt and we would end up in the emergency room at Martha Jefferson," she said. Once her oldest son fell out of his top bunk and fractured a finger necessitating a trip to the ER. "At least," she related, "since I worked for the hospital and knew everyone in the ER, we experienced a minimum wait time to see the doctor and get treated." One of the

benefits of her job! Now days with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren Christmases have even more meaning. The procedure these days is to progress from home to home giving everyone a chance to host a portion of the day. "These days we 'split it up' "cha gave."

it up'," she says." And, while Christmases today may be celebrated differently than Christmases past, it's still Christmas. That's what we need to remember. Merry Christmas!





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Please join us as we kick-off another year of Third Thursday's at The Lodge. We begin the year with Discovering Jefferson's Monticello Landscape presented by Derek Wheeler Research Archaeologist at Monticello and

Crystal O'Connor Field Research Manager at Monticello. They will be discussing the critical role that Monticello's Department of Archaeology plays in understanding the lives of enslaved laborers, as well as analyzing Jefferson's plantation management strategies. They will also outline the department's research goals, using one recently excavated site, an early 19th-century quarter site for the enslaved field laborers, as an example. It's sure to be a fascinating look into the everyday lives of the enslaved laborers and an exploration into how Jefferson himself lived and ran the plantation. It's definitely a great and interesting way to start the year. Don't miss it!

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Proprietor Carole Johnson in the girls' bedroom. All photos by Patrick Healy

A Very Special B & B Opens in Schuyler

By Patrick Healy Correspondent

he first guests to stay here were the cast." says Carole Johnson. We are in the broad

sitting room of Johnson's recently opened John & Olivia's Bed and Breakfast, in the village of Schuyler. The comfy couch is draped with a brightly colored afghan, generous of loop and fat with yarn. The floor is covered with a large rag rug; its mottled rope spiraling out from the center, to form a 6 x 9 oval. There are a couple of spindlebacked chairs. A homey mix of tables, cabinets, and breakfronts occupy such wall space that isn't claimed by the many, simply curtained windows. An antique radio, made of dark wood in the shape of a gothic arch, sits on a high stool which is not quite in and not quite out of the way, as if that is the good-reception spot in the room. Horizontal surfaces display old books or framed photographs, a stereopticon, and engaging nick knacks of wood or tin.

The big country kitchen extends off the sitting room and is arranged around a hewn wooden table, itself surrounded by four hewn benches. Though the standard urban condo terrace is smaller than this table, this kitchen still has plenty of room for the wood cookstove, ceramic butter churn, hand-cranked meat grinder, and other old-time, laborsaving devices. John and Olivia? Granny-style eclectic interiors? Yes, this B&B is the ultimate, immersive Waltons experience.

Not sure about the Waltons? Here's a brief primer. "The Waltons" was a family drama series which ran in primetime on network television through the 1970s and, as made for TV movie events, into the early 1980s. The series told of a large family struggling through

the Great Depression (1929-1939) in rural Virginia. Every week, John and Olivia Walton, their seven children, and John's parents shared their aspirations, joys, and sorrows, while getting mixed up in the doings of their amusing, or exasperating friends and neighbors. Over the decade, fans watched as the children grew up, Grandma Esther suffered a debilitating stroke, and Grandpa Zeb passed away. Set in the past, the show seemed to present an antidote to the wars, political chaos, and social upheavals which characterized the '70s. Indeed, on the big screen, the '70s were the era of "Dirty Harry" and "Death Wish." Everyone from snarky film crit-ics to Ivy League professors found por-tent, even societal destiny, in those dark spaces; all the while dismissing "The Waltons" as nostalgic twaddle. Waltons" as nostalgic twaddle. Community and familial love? Good manners and empathy? These were things of the past, or myths which never really existed at all. Even studio honchos thought fans of the show were unsophisticated rubes who needed to wake up and smell the coffee.

As things turned out, the Death Wish crowd dwindled away while Waltons fandom thrived. Somewhere in the world, an episode of "The Waltons" is playing - right now. Death Wishers occupy their compounds in the Idaho wilderness, or the FBI watch lists. Waltons fans live next door.

Carole Johnson is one of those. In Johnson's case, next door is in the forests an hour or so north of San Francisco. And she's a long-time fan.

"I started with a Walton's room." she says, of the theme decorated space in her home. "I'd host get togethers with other fans there."

One thing led to another, and eventually Johnson took to the road to meet



The Whitley window (Season 4, Episode 22). According to Carole Johnson, "Some guests start to cry when they see this."

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other fans, in other places. One such event was the 40th anniversary party, held in Los Angeles. There Johnson met not just fandom friends, new or old, but members of the show's cast, crew, and production team, including the show's creator and narrator, Earl Hamner, Jr.

Johnson was star struck, of course, but just as striking to her was the degree of love and respect she sensed among the show's members. That aspect of the show which drew her and other fans in, and together, was palpable; not just when acted out on a nostalgic old TV show, but in the here and now. "It's big." she says. "There are millions of us who are fans."

About 8 years ago, Johnson attended a Waltons convention in a nearby state. Some other attendees were planning to travel down to Schuyler afterwards, and convinced Johnson to join them. As Earl Hamner's hometown, and basis of the show's locale, Schuyler is sacred ground to Waltons fans. On the day they arrived, the village was going about its business which, evidently, did not include accommodating random fans of "The Waltons."

"The Waltons Museum was closed. There were no tours of the Hamner house." says Johnson. "I didn't get it. It was like they were missing it." She returned home with that thought nagging her. When she heard that the Hamner house was going on the market, the thought became a mission. "I knew what I had to do."

Johnson closed on the property in the fall of 2016. The previous owner had done a good deal of restorative work, and the house was mostly tour



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Chef Sheila Mae relaxes in the cook's kitchen. This is where you'll find the gas range, microwave, and dishwasher.



A washboard, water heater, and ringer washer enjoy pride of place in the kitchen. Is that FDR's portrait in the front hall? Of course it is.

worthy. But potential doom loomed over the old homeplace. An enormous old tree, rooted in neighboring soil, spread high above its roof, and Johnson knew that when the tree fell, so would her beloved building. So, to get at the tree, Johnson purchased the adjacent parcel, which included the historic Giannini home. Oops. Once the lot was surveyed, the old tree proved to be in the corner of the other adjacent lot. Johnson let it be known that she was interested in that parcel, made her plans, and bit her nails when violent storms passed by. Two years later, she closed on that last piece of property, removed the offending tree, and got to work on her big idea: John and Olivia's B & B.

and Olivia's B & B. As a fan herself, Johnson understood that, since it was fans of the show her B&B would attract, it ought to replicate the show's set. She had the Hamner House open for touring. Earl Hamner's history, the story behind the story, is there. The history is Hamner, and by extension, the series actors. The optics are Walton, and by extension, the characters from that series. In this regard, Johnson has done a fantastic job. Johnson gives all the credit to here builder, Carlton Ballowe.

As we continue our tour it is easy to see why. All of the elements say old-timey. There are windows everywhere, a standard practice in the days before artificial light and ventilation came along. Here and there it is necessary to go up or down a step or two in order to enter an adjacent room. This, too, is common in older homes with their closed in porches, or cobbled-on additions. But there is nothing cobbled about this place. Ballowe is obviously details-obsessive. In fact, the only old-fashioned features missing from this inn are drafty rooms, creaking floors, and inaccessibility. Dish and WiFi? You betcha.

Each bedroom is a showcase. There is an intricate quilt on every bed, with spare quilts hanging from the walls or draped over frames. Some accessories are Depression Era antiques, which replicate those which appeared on the show's sets. Many are actual props from those sets. Johnson can share the story of each and every one of them. To

every one of them. To hear Johnson tell it, finishing the inn was a case of interior design by rerun.

"We would look at a scene, and then set the items in place." So, if Olivia entered her bedroom, took 6 steps then took her comb off of the bureau, the bureau went here, and the comb went there. Johnson laughs at herself. "I had piles of paper scraps cut up into different shapes. I kept pushing them around until I knew where everyuntil I knew where every-thing would go." She laughs again over one particular placement. "We had just set up the water heater." she says, speaking of the rivets-and-pipe-joints contrap-tion that looks more 19th century Sci-Fi than 1930s century Sci-Fi than 1930s Ragged Mountain home. "Carlton came in and couldn't believe it. 'You're not putting that there, are you?' he said. 'But that's where it goes.' I said." And that's where it is. "I can't say enough about him. Carlton was



They're always ready for biscuits at John and Olivia's.

just great to work with." OK. The beds sound great, but what's for breakfast? Inn manager, part concierge/part historian, and Chef de Cuisine all rolled into one, Sheila Mae, rattles it off.

"Waffles, pancakes, biscuits [Of course!], sausage, bacon, scones." she says. "The most popular thing is oatmeal. We make it all from scratch, even our granola. That's because of Carole. It takes longer, and it's more expensive, but she won't have it any other way."

Because store bought and "The Waltons" just don't mix.

The next time you have out of town guests coming, keep this place in mind. If your guests happen to be Waltons fans, tell 'em to get on the plane now. Midway through our tour, we heard the front door thump, followed by some

Midway through our tour, we heard the front door thump, followed by some clumping about. "Anybody home? someone hollered. "Look around and make your-selves at home." Johnson hollered back. We proceeded, leisurely, and eventually got back downstairs, where we found a pleasant, middle-aged couple in the sitting room. They were interested in seeing the Hamner House, so out we went. We chatted a bit in the yard - hello, goodbye - and Johnson led her new guests down the hill to the simple, old house. These people were friendly...polite, seemed to be fond of one another...considerate. Their car showed out of state tags, and they were definitely Waltons fans. As such, they are part of an old time, small town community, which happens to span the globe and includes millions of souls.

Carole Johnson has made a place for them. The front door is unlocked. You can spend the night. And the breakfast will stick to your ribs.

Remembering a Simpler Time

By Ron Smith Correspondent

here is so much going on in the world today, both good and bad. Families can hardly find time to sit down together for a meal. With sports, school, parents having to work two

(or more) jobs and other constraints on our time it sometimes feels there are not enough hours in a day to do what we need to do much less those things we want to do.

Those who grew up prior to the 1960s, particularly if you are a baby boomer, remember the world being a simpler place to live. Not that there were no problems, it just seems that what problems that existed, with the exception of race relations, were perhaps not as complex as those we face today.

The Scottsville Sun newspaper was organized in 195. Published by the Amherst Publishing Company, J. Bernard McDearman was the paper's first editor and Elizabeth Wimer was the managing editor. The paper was devoted to reporting on items of interest and town news. During its existence the paper maintained a circulation of between 500 and 1000 copies! Robert K. "Bobby" Spencer is a Scottsville fixture. Now that Raymon

Robert K. "Bobby" Spencer is a Scottsville fixture. Now that Raymon Thacker is no longer with us, Bobby probably knows more about the history of Scottsville than anyone else in town. When Bobby was a young man he worked for a time at the Scottsville Sun.

The Scottsville Museum is fortunate to be able to employ interns from time to time and, in 2016 Nicole Penn served an internship with the museum thanks to the University of Virginia's Institute for Public History. Bobby Spencer had saved a considerable number of issues of the Sun and loaned them to the museum. Nicole was able to go through each edition and scan it into a form that is today available on the museum website. The 1953 Christmas Eve edition is one of those in the collection.

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Scottsville Sun Newspaper - 1953 Christmas Eve edition. All images courtesy of the Scottsville Museum

Front page news from that date include articles such as: "Student Program Scheduled Sunday at Baptist Church," "Christmas Program Presented At WSC Meeting," "Officers Elected by Scottsville Masonic Lodge," and "On Stage, America Show Nets \$90 for VFW Post."

But there are other articles that illustrate how things were less hectic back then. One article tells of "large crowds" gathering at Smith Chevrolet Sales to see the brand new 1954 Chevrolet. W. B. Morgan, Chief Forest Warden for Fluvanna County "thanked" the public keeping the number of forest fires at a minimum. He also thanked the Scottsville Vol. Fire Department for their help throughout the year.

There were also articles about our soldiers. The Korean Conflict was going on and Pvt. Russell Boatwright of Esmont was there. Army Sgt. Edward D. Ward, whose wife Glodean and parents, Rev. and Mrs. W. D. Ward live in Esmont, is stationed in Germany. And, the Tri-County Riding Club had a breakfast but it was so cold out no one could ride their horse to the event and had to use automobiles.

"Household Hints" by Nada Sweeney, gave information on roasting a turkey, making mashed potato soufflé, and creating the perfect plum pudding for dessert. "Country Farm Notes" by P. H. France was all about increasing your pine crop next year. And, the Junior Garden Club decided to meet during the holidays so they could plan their activities for the coming year.

When you live in a small town you pretty much know everyone's business (whether you admit it or not) and they know yours. The Scottsville Sun published everyone's business. Following is an example from Nancy Dorrier's column "Tidbits." – "Jane Bruce, sister to Shirley Dorrier and Tom Bruce and daughter to Mrs. T. E., and otherwise known as the prodigal daughter, arrived Tuesday night to spend the entire Christmas week in Scottsville. She hails from the big city of New York. But in spite of all the sophisticating influences, Jane doesn't forget the good old home town."

There are items of interest from Palmyra, Howardsville, and Nelson. Almost all the advertising in this issue of the Sun focused on the Christmas with the United States Rubber Company taking out a full page to reprint the 1897 "Yes Virginia, There is A Santa Claus" letter that became famous when a little girl wrote the New Amanda Hall spent Thursday here," "Lena White of Richmond spent the weekend with her brother and sister in law, Mr. and Mrs. Walter White." The column also goes on to say that the Busy Bee Club will have a tea at the home of Mrs. Julia Jackson, and the Union Baptist Church Sunday School will have a Christmas party.

Through the kindness of Bobby Spencer and the hard work of Nicole Penn, this period of time in Scottsville's history is not only recorded for future generations, it is available for everyone who has internet access. Go to the Scottsville Museum website, in the search block type Scottsville Sun. There are numerous editions available to read and the reading is not only interesting, it will give you pause to stop and think that maybe the good old days were, in a number of respects, good.





Robert K. "Bobby" Spencer, 1953 - His contributions to the Scottsville Museum will ensure the town's history won't be forgotten.

York Sun newspaper for an answer to her question about Santa. There is also a daily meditation from The Upper Room devotional publication.

When you look at this paper you will realize that race relations have come a long way since 1953, even though there is still a long way to go. The Sun devoted about three column inches for a section called "Colored Notes." The reporting in this section showed that people of color were doing the same things as everyone else. "Rev. D. Porter, a 14 year old from Unionville, will preach at Union Baptist Church," "Harry Walker and his sister, Mrs. Amanda Hall spent Thursday here." "Lena White



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Scholarship Essay Contest for Martin Luther King Day Celebration 2020

College scholarship money awaits High School seniors who live in southern

Albemarle County. The Martin Luther King Day Commemoration Committee will award up to four scholarships to students who live in the Monticello High School district and who will be entering their first year of college in the fall of 2020.

Interested students are invited to enter the 30th annual essay contest held in connection with the local celebration of Dr. King's life and work. The topic for the essay is "Has Dr. King's Dream Been Fulfilled?" Scholarship funds will be awarded to the most creative, well-researched and original interpretations of the topic.

Application forms and further details are available from Mr. Graham Paige, 286-3639 or gtpaige@aol.com. Completed essays must be received by December 31, 2019.

Winners will be announced at the Martin Luther King Day celebration on Sunday, January 19, at Chestnut Grove Baptist Church, Esmont.



December 21, 2019 Saturday 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM James River Brewery 561 Valley St Scottsville Karaoke at JRB Join JRB on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month for Karaoke. Cost: Free Categories: Nightlife & Singles This event repeats on various days:Dec 21, Jan 4



The James River Quilters held their Christmas gift exchange at the Scottsville Library. Photo by Ron Smith



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Mount Ida Reserve Celestial Tasting: Winter Solstice December 22 @ 12:00 pm - 7:00 pm celestial tastings 5600 Moonlight Dr, Scottsville, We are located off of Blenheim Road. (434) 286-4282

Celebrate the stars with our Celestial Tasting Series! Featuring our Over the Moon Sparkling, Stargazer Rose, and Moonlight White blend, these wines will be sure to pair with any star-gazing event! Available in the Tasting Room all day, no ticket necessary. \$12 per tasting .



Scottsville Library 330 Bird Street, Scottsville • Phone: 434.286.3541

Hygge and Bullet Journaling Saturday, January 4, 2020, 10am – 12pm Start the year off cozy! Join us for Danish pastries, coffee and hot chocolate while we make resolutions to down. Explore the process of journaling, including bullet journaling, and learn the benefits of writing with a pen and paper. Bring your own journal; there will also be a limited supply available. A fun family activity, best for ages 8 and up





at PALMYRA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 56 Palmyra Way Historic Palmyra

All are welcome to our 7:00 P.M. Christmas Eve Service which includes our choir and candles

Sunday Services at 8:30 A.M. and 11:00 A.M.

Fluvanna County Arts Council



Presents the 2019-2020 Season at Carysbrook Performing Arts Center



Saturday, January 11 at 2:00pm

They say that music is good for the soul. Prepare to be uplifted with the gospel songs provided by these exceptional performers. Chris Lewis with his many musical talents is a native of Fluvanna County; Charlsie Stratton is from Charlottesville and has performed not only with her home church, Zion Union Baptist Church but also with the Oratorio Society of Virginia and Zelda Whindleton-Peterson, from Richmond is looking forward to recording her first gospel CD. "When there's music in your soul, there's soul in your music"!

Next Performance:



Odyssey of Soul Gospel of Soul: Race & Religion: A Circle Broken Saturday, February 8 at 7:30pm

Back by popular demand, musician and educator Horace Scruggs and his band bring their layered harmonies and soulful delivery for another unique "learning and listening" concert. Following up on his past programs tracing the evolution of soul, gospel and music of the civil rights era, Scruggs explores through commentary and live performance the ways in which music, race, and religion influence and inform one another.

Unless otherwise specified, Admission is: \$12 Advance, \$15 Day of Performance, \$10 Student/Military/Veterans, Family Package \$5/person (2 Adults max, + 3 or more children) • To purchase online: http://www.Carysbrook.org Please note: No reserved seating.

Carysbrook Performing Arts Center • 8880 James Madison Highway (Hwy 15) Fork Union,VA 23055

December 20, 2019–January 23, 2020 • SCOTTSVILLE MONTHLY • 9



Channeling on the Mekong River. Photo courtesy of Matt Lawless

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We are a debt relief agency. Additional location in Zion Crossroads. Handicap accessible. 10 • SCOTTSVILLE MONTHLY • December 20, 2019–January 23, 2020 In October of 2018, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) held its annual conference in Baltimore, Maryland. The convenience of this location attracted Lawless, who attended the four-day conference to hobnob with his peers, and improve his administrative chops. One of the opportunities he brought home was a program which would provide exchange arrangements between American city managers and members of the Young South East Asia Leadership Initiative (YSEALI). The town's application was accepted, and Scottsville became the smallest jurisdiction in the 2019 class, joining Dallas, Minneapolis, and Oak Ridge, Tennessee among other cities and towns. In May of this year, Thai Van Nguyen joined the town staff for four weeks of

In May of this year, Thai Van Nguyen joined the town staff for four weeks of immersive administrative experience, James River Valley style. "He worked on our Small Area Plan." says Lawless. "He was especially helpful directing our focus groups."

Mr. Thai hails from the Mekong Delta region in Vietnam. According to Lawless, "He was quite taken with the area. He's an avid cyclist and photographer, so we went running and cycling together. Everywhere he went he would take pictures."

Lawless and Thai day tripped down to Richmond, and also over to Amherst to attend a Monocan Pow-Wow. Day to day, Thai worked on yown business, strolled the streets, popped into the shops, and supped and sipped in the local cafes. Nights and weekends were for backyard and front porch settin', get-togethers including a Game of Thrones themed party, the farmers market, local church services and, always, the river.

"Éverything here is completely different from his home." says Lawless. "The hills, the biodiversity...the river is narrow." On the other hand, the Mekong Delta is an alluvial plain of some 15,000 square miles, where tropical mudflats and rice paddies sprawl among numberless bayous, tidal creeks, and the river's nine major

See Lawless page 11





We're not In Kansas anymore, Toto. Thai Vann Nguyen and Matt Lawless go boating to examine a farmer's field.

channels. The word Mekong derives from an ancient phrase meaning Nine Dragons. Lawless went to Vietnam for two weeks over September and October. He was just

as struck by the Mekong vistas there as Thai was by our James River scenery here. 'I never figured out which was the main channel." says Lawless of the Mekong River. "I would look across a great river, and just past the far bank was an even greater river. The creeks were running the wrong way. It took me a while to figure out what was going on." Around here we know how creeks are supposed to work. The water runs down the hill, and into the river. What looked like creeks to Lawless are really just backwaters of the Mekong River; the river water pushing out into its flat, tidal marsh surroundings.

Lawless accompanied Thai on his daily rounds, meeting with farmers, village councils, governmental officials, and women's groups. Thai pointed out the impor-tance of his meetings with this last category. Though he is an agricultural specialist - men's business - he must also attend meetings about women's health, child rearing, home economics, and the like. If he doesn't, he'll miss at least half of the local Ag story. As Lawless explains, "In mixed company, Vietnamese women will defer to the men, who then do all of the talking.

One of the biggest changes the Vietnamese government has implemented in the Mekong Delta is the rationalization of land use. The old ways had created a hodgepodge of individual or village paddies which had come about through complex webs of social, cultural, and agricultural traditions. Some of those traditions are, to one degree or another, still around. To explain the melding of tradition with central plan-ning, Lawless points to the Communist government's approach to religion. "In theory, there is no religion in Vietnam. In practice it is more of a soft atheism. Over the years, government officials have seen that it is easier to implement a program if they can get the local Buddhist monks on board." A big change is the replacement of traditional agricultural practices with modern, agri-business methods. "There is no biodiversity." says Lawless. "None. The use of



Mekong Delta Vista. This Buddhist monestary sits on a piney knob above the floodplain. Looks like it's laundry day on the patio.



Crossword Answers page 15

Lawless from page 11 -

pesticides means there are no fish, no birds, no small animals; nothing but rice." The new strains of rice, and accelerated growing methods produce higher yields which, of course, command lower prices. Traditionalists have argued that the older methods work better overall.

"There has been some push back." says Lawless. "There are some organic farms here and there." Farmers used to raise fish in their flooded paddies and have harvests of both fish and rice. And the rich river silt, in which the rice grew was fertilized by the fish droppings. According to Lawless, "Thai is helping farmers find markets, and better prices, for traditionally raised crops."

for traditionally raised crops." Another major change came with the more linear approach to the way paddies should be laid out. In a wetland world, the tops of the rice paddy dykes are where the most reliably dry land is found. Since the dawn of rice cultivation, the dykes have served as pathways among the paddies. Optimum usage of these paths is not found in a garden-maze pattern, zig-zagging among the flooded rectangles of rice, but in more of an urban grid pattern of dykes. Thus, a short stretch between small paddies can still serves as a farm lane. But by taking a Delta wide approach to the lay-out, the dykes can also serve as both inter and intra-village roads, feeder roads, and main arteries. Not surprisingly, transportation has improved using the newer methods. Says Lawless, "Most days, Thai com-

Says Lawless, "Most days, Thai commutes about ten miles to work by biking along one of these dyke roads." So, was anything gained by this administrative, cross-cultural pollination? Lawless is enthusiastically affirmative. "My strength is in surveys, not focus groups. They don't do surveys in Vietnam, but use a focus group approach instead."

Which makes sense, given the cultural differences between the U.S. and Vietnam. We are comfortable with the rat-a tat-tat of the love it or hate it list of questions, and its instantaneous statistical result. The Vietnamese are not. It is said that we reinvent ourselves every day, while they revere tradition; snap, crackle, pop vs. a languid discovery of body language nuances.

"Not only did he run the focus groups [on the Small Area Plan], but he created a manual of procedures for us, covering group organization and direction. We will be using it as we move forward."

Lawless says he was able to offer some administrative guidance to his hosts, as well. "I stressed the importance of diversity, when planning." Vietnam, like most places, has ethnic minorities, and indigenous tribal groups within its population. And, as in most places, those people have not often fared well in the decision-making process.

"No corruption." was another point Lawless stressed. A lofty goal, certainly; but our offended demand for accountability is preferable to the Vietnamese's casual acceptance of the practice. "I really stressed local autonomy." says Lawless. One suspects that, in this regard, he preached to the local choirs



Organic farmer Thanh Dat goes over some details with Thai and Lawless.

in the communist governed Vietnam. On the whole, this trade looks like a win-win. The Ag consultant from the small market state taught us - the digitally driven denizens of the global colossus - how to talk to one another.

Going back the other way, our own

buried-in-paperwork bureaucrat shared with a centrally planned, but traditions bound group the high-concept secrets of our own unbound culture:

each of us counts; rule of law; and, less-is-more governance.

Hats off to Mr. Thai, and Mr. Lawless!



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Festival of Lights trees made Council Chambers a festive place to hold meetings this year.



Santa arrives for the lighting of the town's Christmas tree.



Santa greets children at the town's Christmas Tree.



The Festival of Lights displayed twenty trees.



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WINNER Coleman Farm Supply of Appomattox!

Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center Historic Cabin Decorating Contest

Holiday Lake 4H Educational Center welcomed the general public to Christmas Open House on Friday, December 6th from 4-7 PM to enjoy games, hayrides, campfire and view the Center and our historic cabins decorated in lights for competition. Our 30th Annual Christmas Camp followed the Open House. Cabins were decorated by Appomattox, Brunswick, Campbell, Fluvanna, Lynchburg, and Nottoway 4H Extension Offices, Coleman Farm Supply of Appomattox, Hix Hideout of Appomattox, Bland Reid Funeral Home of Farmville, and Foxfire Farm of Scottsville. The winner of the 4H Extension Office cabin was Fluvanna and the business cabin winner was Coleman Farm Supply of Appomattox, each winning a 4H Summer Camp Scholarship.



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