

Buckingham

July 17–August 13, 2020

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The Master Gardeners of Buckingham Share Their Gardening Skills

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Assistant Principal
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Elsie Towler's yard contains many plants and flowers that have personal stories. This hydrangea, which bloomed pink for a number of years, was a gift to her late father from his church. Elsie Towler planted the shrub, moving it around a bit, before she resolved that it likes to be in the corner of her home.

Photo by Sue A. Milles

Cover designed by Marilyn Ellinger

Buckingham Beacon

A monthly publication

Publisher

C.M. Santos
valleyeditor1@gmail.com

Office Manager

Edee Povol
eedee@fluvannareview.com
Classified Line Advertising
(434) 207-0221

Advertising Director

Judi Price
judi.valleypublishing@gmail.com

Graphic Designer

Marilyn Ellinger

Writers

Martha Louis
Sue Miles
Joanne Yeck

Contributors

Master Gardeners

E-mail: valleyeditor1@gmail.com

Mailing address: P.O. Box 59,
Palmyra, VA 22963

Office location: 106 Crofton Plaza,
Suite 1, Palmyra VA 22963.

Phone: (434) 591-1000

Fax: (434) 589-1704

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Display ad rates: For information including rates and deadlines call Judi Price at 434-207-0223.

Subscriptions: Copies will be mailed for the subscription price of \$40 per year. Please mail a check and a note with your name and address to: *Buckingham Beacon* Subscriptions Dept., P.O. Box 59, Palmyra, VA 22963.

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Buckingham County Middle School: Cristin Morris Joins Staff as Assistant Principal

By Sue A. Miles
Correspondent

Cristin Morris is joining the Buckingham County Public School staff as Assistant Principal of Buckingham County Middle School. A graduate of Altavista High school, she earned a Bachelors of Science in Mathematics from Longwood University, a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction from American College of Education and a post-graduate certificate in Educational Leadership from Longwood University.

Along with teaching at the middle and high school levels at Cumberland County Public Schools, Morris also taught at Beaumont Correctional Facility and Prince Edward High School. Morris said that she was drawn to the Buckingham school system because of its camaraderie and community spirit. "I wanted to become a part of such a wonderful community and school. Teaching has always been a passion of mine but over the years I have felt compelled to expand outside of my classroom. While taking administrative classes, I realized that I would love to not only be influential to students but also to the school and community."

As Assistant Principal, Morris' duties will include daily supervision, the task of motivating students and faculty, maintaining school policies and procedures to ensure a safe learning environment, providing professional development opportunities, and working cohesively with all stakeholders to provide the most quality education available to students.

This coming school year will take on a different look due to the pandemic. Morris spoke on that issue. "We will be working as a team with teachers, staff members, parents and community members to follow the Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, the requirements set by the State of Virginia and the Superintendent of Virginia Department of Education, to provide students not only



Cristin Morris, new middle school vice principal, is shown preparing for the upcoming school year, with principal, Zane Harshman. Photo by Sue A. Miles

with an equitable and quality education but also a safe learning environment." Morris also shared her philosophy on school leadership. "Effective leaders are able to establish a shared vision with faculty members, students, and the community by building positive and respected relationships. It is important to remember that each stakeholder involved in a school system is different, essential, and requires an understanding of differing viewpoints."

Congratulations to Cristin Morris and welcome to Buckingham.

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Master Gardeners of Buckingham

Share Their Gardening Skills

By Sue A. Miles
Correspondent

As COVID-19 keeps people at home, gardening - whether flowers or vegetables - has gained more popularity. Along with having more time to work around the home, people are also more aware of the importance of having home grown food accessible from their own personal gardens.

With this renewed interest in gardening, many people are also realizing that there is more involved than throwing seeds on the ground or sticking a plant in a hole. Nothing is more frustrating than investing in seeds and plants and then seeing poor, or worse yet, no results. Simply put, gardening is not rocket science, but it does require some thought. Just ask a Master Gardener.

A what? That's right, a Master Gardener. There are four such individuals living in Buckingham County and they are eager to share their knowledge and to provide service to the county's citizens. Keep in mind, the "Master" represents the willingness of Jackie Fairbarns, Kelly Love-Schwarz, Tom Schwarz, and Elsie Towler to have literally **dug deeper** into the concept of what it takes to be a successful gardener. All are members of the Heart of Virginia Master Gardener organization, whose purpose, as specially trained volunteer educators, is to provide sound gardening information to the local community.

In order to become a certified Master Gardener individuals must complete 50 hours of classroom instruction through the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) in subjects such as basic botany; soils and fertilizers; plant propagation; diagnosing plant damage; pesticide use and safety; trees and shrubs; lawn and turf management; pruning; landscape design; water quality; and organic practices. After classroom instruction has been satisfactorily completed, trainees become Master Gardener interns. Interns are required to volunteer an additional 50 hours during their first year before becoming an official VCE Master Gardener. Active Master

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Jackie Fairbarns, shown with her favorite plant, purple asparagus, has a large number of raised beds on her property. She fills them with a variety of flowers and vegetables, each having a place in her life journey of being a Master Gardener. Photo by Sue A. Miles

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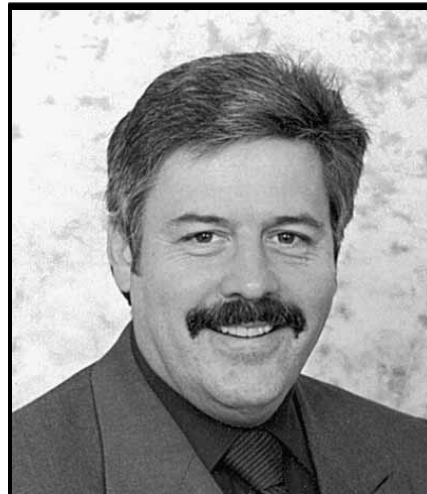
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Gardeners must receive an additional eight hours of advanced training and volunteer at least 20 hours each year to keep the certification. The training is given once a year through the VCE.

But, also, keep in mind that people don't have to go through a certification course to be successful gardeners. If you have the will and the drive to let the world of gardening into your life or to expand what you already know, then the information is there. It simply needs to be applied.

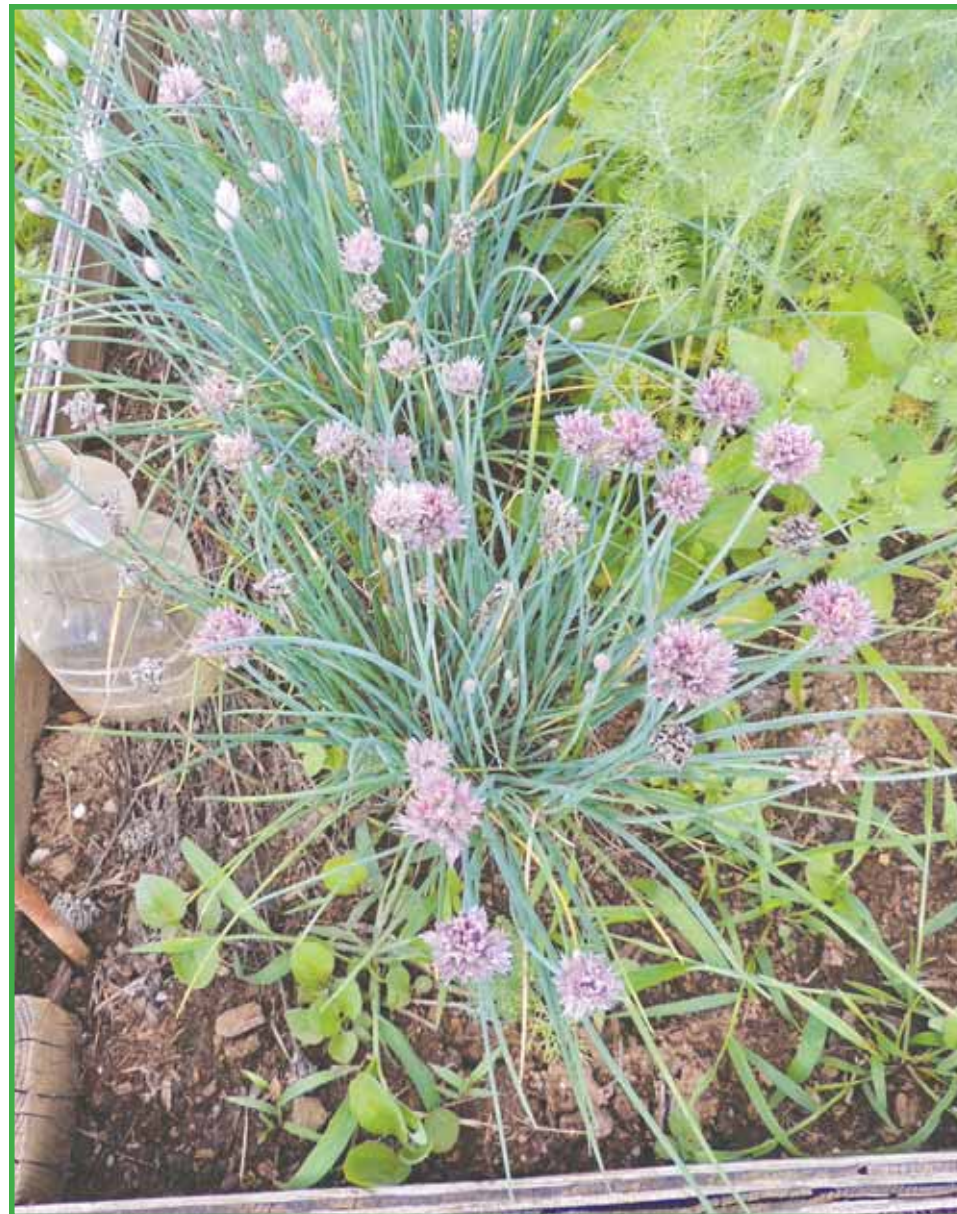
"As long as I can remember, I

have been interested in growing plants," said Fairbarns. "During World War II, I was an enthusiastic helper in my mother's Victory Garden. Growing our own food was not undertaken for its healthy exercise benefits; it was a practical necessity." Fairbarns, like most all Master Gardeners, support the cause of planting native plants, which are generally easier to grow and preserve biodiversity. She also is very involved in offering participating in service activities and events to teach others. "We participate in plant sales, seed distribution, and newspaper and radio informational programs," she said.

Fairbarns noted that good gardening starts with the soil. "Before I enrolled in the program I had not really given any thought to active soil building," she said. "Learning about soil structure, texture, components and how these affect growing plants has guided my gardening ever since." Elise Towler supports that premise. "Healthy soil is the basis for successful gardening," she said. "Now that I've completed the certification, I pay a lot of attention to the soil. I add compost and I have the soil tested to see what other amendments are needed and I avoid using chemical pesticides."

Growing up, Kelly Love-Schwarz's family had a garden every year. "We always had fresh vegetables, wild raspberries, asparagus and herbs growing. I have very fond memories of visiting the gardens of Maymont Park in Richmond and have always dreamed of creating landscapes that are beautiful." Husband Tom shared that his love of gardening developed as a child as he enjoyed good tasting food.

All of these gardeners acknowledge that they've made mistakes. "I think the biggest mistake new



Chives, among other herbs, are easy to grow and play a great role in the kitchen. Jackie Fairbarns has a large assortment of herbs in her raised beds.

gardeners make is trying to do too much," said Towler. Schwarz believes that too often, new gardeners throw seeds in the ground without researching what is being planted. But, he also acknowledges that it can be trial and error when gardening. "If the plants die, don't think of it as a failure. Just think of it as a lesson on what not to do the next time." Love-Schwarz noted that before she completed the Master

Gardener course she was killing plants. "I still have my share of failures, but it's not as devastating as it was before I entered the training course." Along with testing the soil, Love-Schwarz notes the importance of fertilizer. "I use fertilizer. I don't skimp on it," she said. "10-10-10 fertilizer is a cheap way to work wonders with your ego and plants." "When you

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Whether you garden traditionally or use raised beds, there is great satisfaction when it works. Towler chooses to plant her garden in raised beds and makes a point of building up the soil to get the best results. All photos by Sue A. Milles

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are first starting you don't need expensive specialty food. Just go with what won't break the bank and give yourself some confidence."

Fairbarns made a point to encourage new gardeners to attend a few Master Gardener sponsored education presentations." She also stressed the importance of making connections with other gardeners in the area. "Reach out to other gardeners to get practical advice and information," she said. But, it always comes back to the soil test. "Every garden begins with dirt and a soil test will give information to make wise decisions about applying lime and fertilizer," said Fairbarns.

That soil test can be given through a Virginia Cooperative Extension Office. The test report will provide soil structure information as well as PH, and available levels of phosphorus, potassium and seven. "After you get the kit, you take samples of soil from several locations, mix them all together and then mail it to Virginia Tech," said Fairbarns. "Once the results come in, gardeners will have a better understanding of their soil. The Extension Office will also review the results and advise gardeners."

Along with fresh food and the beauty of flowers there are a variety of other benefits to gardening. And, with COVID still doing its best to control our lives, gardening can actually take on a new purpose. "I enjoy the exercise gardening requires," says Towler. "In the summer I take pleasure in knowing that some of my meals come completely from my garden. I also enjoy teaching my grandchildren about gardening, and sharing with family and friends. It's also my creative outlet." Fairbarns also shared her thoughts about the joys of gardening. "Gardening gets me



Tom Schwarz and his wife, Kelly Love-Schwarz, are shown standing on one part of their property. Tom, who prefers edible plants, discusses the orchard with Kelly. "I like to grow plants that have a purpose," said Schwarz. Photo by Sue A. Miles

out of the house in a socially acceptable way and I don't have to wear a mask. I enjoy it and benefit from the really fresh food grown and harvested by my own hands."

All of the Master Gardeners agreed that no matter how long someone is involved in gardening, there is always something more to learn. "Don't feel bad if you don't do it right," said Schwarz. "That's one of the advantages of having Master Gardeners in the area. People get the benefit of listening to others' failures, so they potentially don't make the same mistakes themselves."

Perhaps Love-Schwarz said it best when giving advice to new gardeners who are seeking advice. "Don't wait. There is no time better than the present. Ask neighbors what they are growing and what is doing well for them. I love to eat fresh fruits and vegetables directly from the garden. I enjoy the beauty of my gardens. Something is usually always blooming. And, yes, I have lots of weeds, rocks and clay soil, just like everyone else has in Buckingham. I am taking what I have and making the best of it."

If you are already gardening, then good for you. If you've always considered gardening but have not taken that first step, then know that there's help available. Sometimes it's simply asking a neighbor or relative who's already gardening. Other times it's doing basic research and following through. And, then there's the Virginia Cooperative Extension Office and the resources of the county's Master Gardeners.

If you're interested in learning more about the Master Gardener program go to <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/college> or contact Amber Anderson at the Cumberland Extension Office, 804-492-4390. Contact the Buckingham Extension Office to obtain a soil test kit or go to <https://www.soiltest.vt.edu>.

Prayer Group for Buckingham Police and Officials



Buckingham County Board of Supervisors, elected officials, staff and members of the law enforcement recently joined with pastors of area churches to be part of a prayer group in front of the Courthouse. Organized by area churches, the participants prayed together, heard the word of God, and took a short walk through the court house village. The theme of the gathering was "When We Pray, Taking it to the Streets."

Photo by Sue A. Miles.



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