



NORTHEAST JOURNAL

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St. Petersburg, FL
EST. SEPTEMBER 2004

Good People ∞ Good Places ∞ Good Things Happening

Adventure Calls to Old Northeast Visual Storytellers

Janan Talafer

James and Julie Branaman like to think outside the box – way outside the box. They once lived in a camper van for 13 months on a cross-country trip when they moved from Seattle to St. Petersburg. They’ve traveled deep into the swamp in the Florida Everglades with the mosquitoes, the gators, and the snakes. And

they were high up in the lookout tower in a remote area of the Rocky Mountain State Park at 1am taking pictures and watching the star-studded sky while an unknown critter with bright green eyes was watching them.

Self-described visual storytellers, journalists, and explorers, the 40-something Old Northeast couple are always up for the next adventure,

Continued on page 10



Julie, Teagan, and James playing at Pass-A-Grille Beach

A Monument to the World’s First Airline

Will Michaels

Each year, the Tony Jannus Distinguished Aviation Society celebrates the World’s First Airline and its renowned pilot, Tony Jannus. Where was this airline? New York? Chicago? London? Berlin? No... the first airline originated right here in St. Petersburg. Presently an effort is underway to erect a worthy monument to an

event that both led the way to today’s multi-billion dollar commercial aviation industry, and also serves as a model of a community coming together to embrace a new technology. But, before discussing the new monument, let us first recall the history of that inspiring event.

The world’s first regularly scheduled airline took off from the Central Yacht Basin on New Year’s Day 1914. The airline was known as the St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line. It was organized just a few months prior to that New Year’s take-off. The airline was the brainchild of Percival E. Fansler, a Jacksonville-based electrical engineer.

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Artist Robert Holmes

Capturing the ‘Burg in Acrylics

Livia Zien

By day, the streets of the Old Northeast proudly exhibit homes in architectural styles ranging from Craftsman Bungalow to Queen Anne Victorian built during the construction boom of the early 1900s. Beautiful, historical, and stately, these homes are works of art themselves. Brick-paved roads, magnificent palms, and grandiose live oaks add to their charm. As the sun sets, and especially during the holidays, the neighborhood takes on a different persona, transforming into a magical Floridian-Winter Wonderland. People passing by can enjoy the elegant lights, classical bold red bows, and romantic luminaries that adorn the neighborhood from the streets. But once a year, during the annual Historic Old Northeast Neighborhood Association’s Candlelight Tour of Homes, the public is invited inside. Then it’s possible to catch a glimpse of the unique interiors while also learning about the history, restoration projects, and even a little about the owners of the eight selected homes. Last December, HONNA celebrated the 20th anniversary of the popular candlelight tours.

For the past four years, HONNA has commissioned local artist Robert Holmes to paint portraits of the homes to go into the tour’s holiday guide book. The acrylic paintings are then presented to the homeowners at the end of the evening after a dinner at the Westminster Palms. Since the homes are not all selected simultaneously, Robert explains, “Whenever they drop the flag, I start. HONNA picks the homes, lets us know where they are, and gives us the name and address.” He and his wife Margot then go to the address, take pictures, but do not meet the owners.

The process then begins. Robert lays the picture on his desk, makes a grid so he can enlarge the final product, doubling each side, quadrupling the area. “I draw it first with a pencil—the whole thing right down to every leaf and branch.” It takes him about a month to complete all the paintings, since he does not want to rush. He says he enjoys painting portraits of the HONNA Candlelight Tours because of the architectural uniqueness and historical significance of the homes.

Robert says he started painting at the age of three. “I learned how to draw on my mom’s chalkboard. I’ve always had a camera, ever since I was a little kid. My first camera was a twin-lens Yashica-D,” he recalls. Now he carries a little Sony digital camera, commenting, “Technology is amazing.”

Everywhere he goes, Robert takes his camera and paints,

Continued on page 26



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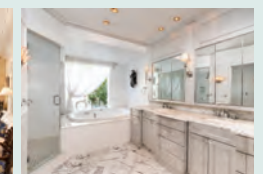
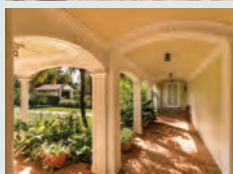
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Wow, Happy New Year!

I'm not sure about you, but 2017 was quite challenging for me at the micro and macro levels. I am very grateful that we have seasons and peaks and valleys and change to keep things fresh and interesting! Phew!

While I have many 'causes' I like to promote – just about anything that uplifts and inspires people and planet – I am particularly focused on the health of our oceans at this time in my life. It just seems to me that if our oceans become sick and 'die' (read about the far-reaching impacts of the degradation of our coral reefs), and that since ¾ of planet Earth is covered in water, it just makes sense that we need to make a shift in our behaviors.

As you know, I don't normally go down a negative path, but I am writing this to help spread awareness and to get people thinking. My daughter did that for me.

Last spring, she presented her Global Scholars senior capstone findings. Her topic was ocean plastic pollution. Boy, were my eyes opened wide!

Thankfully, not only did my daughter raise awareness about how bad ocean plastic pollution is, she shared solutions and promoted companies taking great steps to turn things around. She was so impressed with the company, 4Ocean, that she decided to become one of their 'ambassadors' and started a bracelet drive at her high school that resulted in removing over 100 pounds of trash from our oceans. 4Ocean makes bracelets out of post-consumer plastic and sells them. The proceeds go toward removing ocean pollution – for every bracelet sold, 1 pound of trash is removed.

The ripple effect continues. Not only am I writing about her collaboration with 4Ocean, in this column, and the good that resulted, I am working with the company to find biodegradable plastic bags that degrade very quickly (unlike the ones we used from our previous sponsor). We think we have found a company that uses a plant-based starch that is water-proof and decomposes quickly. Stay tuned for more information about both companies in the next issue.

For now, have a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2018 and please keep your eyes, hearts and minds wide open!

Gen

CORRECTION: In the November/December 2017 *Northeast Journal* article about Wunderfarms, a photo caption identified Robin Wiltshire by the wrong name. Our apologies to Robin, and our thanks again to Wunderfarms.

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MEET THE WRITERS

We would like to sincerely thank and introduce our contributors. The time and talent they dedicate to writing about good people, good places, and good things happening is what makes the *Northeast Journal* the quality publication that our readers have come to expect and love.


Samantha Bond Richman relocated to the Old Northeast in 2014 after living in Tampa for 28 years. She owns Sam Bond Benefit Group, a downtown insurance agency. She and husband Tim enjoy fishing, golf, and supporting family-oriented charitable causes. 

Jeannie Carlson is a correspondent for Tampa Bay Newspapers, Inc. and an adjunct professor of English at local colleges in the area. A resident of the Old Northeast since 2000, she is the publicity/entertainment chair for the Suncoast Scandinavian Club. [carlburn@tampabay.rr.com] 

Rick Carson has lived in St. Pete since 2001, after a career journey that took him from national Republican politics to the innkeeper of a B&B – from the cesspools of Washington to cleaning guestroom toilets (ask him if there is any difference). [nsnaeditor@aol.com] 

Linda Dobbs, 12-year ONE resident; lived/worked in 10 states and three continents; a journalist/editor for 40 years; member of City's International Relations Committee and Dali Guild; Tai Chi enthusiast; docent-in-training at Sunken Gardens. Husband Bob, 3 children, 3 grandchildren. [linda_dobbs@yahoo.com] 

Sara W. Hopkins has lived in Chicago, New York, London, and Los Angeles prior to St. Petersburg. She is a former literary agent and now is vice president of a local corporate training company. In her spare time, she writes novels and screenplays. 


Diana Krause Geegan, a UCF grad, taught school and later excelled in the financial services field. She found her passion in real estate and utilizes her skills and training as a successful realtor. She loves spending time with friends and family, studying God's Word and giving back to the St. Pete community. 

Rebecca Malowany is a Tampa Bay native, Snell Isle resident, freelance writer, and businesswoman. She earned her Master's Degree from the George Washington University and Bachelor's from FSU. Becky has a passion for travel, art, sports, animal welfare, and the environment. [rlemmon123@gmail.com] 

Will Michaels is retired as executive director of the History Museum and has served as president of St. Petersburg Preservation and vice president of the Dr. Carter G. Woodson Museum of African American History. He is the author of *The Making of St. Petersburg*. [wmichaels2@tampabay.rr.com] 

Janan Talafer A long-time Snell Isle resident, Janan Talafer enjoys writing about people and places in St. Petersburg, her adopted hometown. She loves swing dancing, blues music, and gardening, even when the weeds threaten to overtake the yard. [janantalafer@gmail.com] 

Holly K. Walker has over 20 years of experience in speaking and writing both professionally and socially. She has been a resident of NE St. Petersburg since 1995. She is married and has two children. She also enjoys philanthropy and serves on several boards. [walker93@gte.net] 

Livia Zien moved to the area from Washington, DC in 2000. She married, traveled, and changed careers from electrical engineering to culinary arts to teaching math. Livia (who also enjoys running and swimming) and her husband Greg love life in the ONE with their two kitties. 

ONE Inspires

Jeannie Carlson

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Roseanna Costa with Awilda & Brian Harrington

HOLIDAY CHARITY FUNDRAISER ON SNELL ISLE

Rebecca Malowany

On December 7, Joyce and Walter Larson generously hosted a fabulous holiday cocktail party fundraiser at their beautiful home on Snell Isle. The event benefited Infinity, the League to Aid Abused Children & Adults, Inc., a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Infinity's mission is to provide direct financial support to CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse), Suncoast Center, Inc. (medical foster care program) and Brookwood Florida-Central, Inc. (residential home for girls).

This was the Larson's 11th year hosting Infinity's holiday charity event. As always, it was a huge success. Over 170 Snell Isle and St. Petersburg residents and supporters attended the fundraiser. The event successfully raised thousands of dollars through ticket sales and donations which will directly benefit abused and neglected children and adults in the St. Petersburg community.

Infinity has served the St. Petersburg community for more than 37 years. If you would like more information or membership in this worthwhile organization, please visit www.InfinityStPete.org.



Jackie O'Brien with Debbie Van Solkema and Debbie Olivier



Jenna & Trey Malowany with Joy & Bob Rudnicki and Meg Milligan



Gaelynn Thurman and Lariana Forsythe of CASA, with Joy Rudnicki, and Abigayle Dhani and Laurie Elbow from Suncoast Center, Inc.

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ARTIST PROFILE

MOFA Brings Out-of-This-World Creativity to St. Pete

Samantha Bond Richman

Beyond traditional art forms and historic artifacts, the Museum of Fine Arts in the heart of downtown brings exceptional traveling exhibits for the enjoyment of its visitors. On display through April 1, 2018 is the utterly fantastic and out-of-this-world production *Star Wars and the Power of Costume* featuring everything from early pencil sketches to entire scenes from one the most iconic movie series ever created.

To kick off the exhibit, Doug Chiang (pronounced Chang), vice president and executive director of Lucasfilm, met with several local news organizations, including the *Northeast Journal*, to offer insight into the process of creative design. With his youthful smile and apparent deep passion for his work, Chiang energetically answered dozens of questions, while photographers worked to get the best shots of both the artist and the surrounding *Star Wars* vignettes on display at the museum.

Chiang has a lengthy professional biography that includes working as a director, designer, visual effects and concept artist. He is, in short, a very creative person. In 1993, his work on the romantic film *Ghost* earned him an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects. In 1995, George Lucas personally selected Chiang to serve as head of the Lucasfilm art department for seven years, and he worked on *Star Wars: Episodes 1 and 11*.

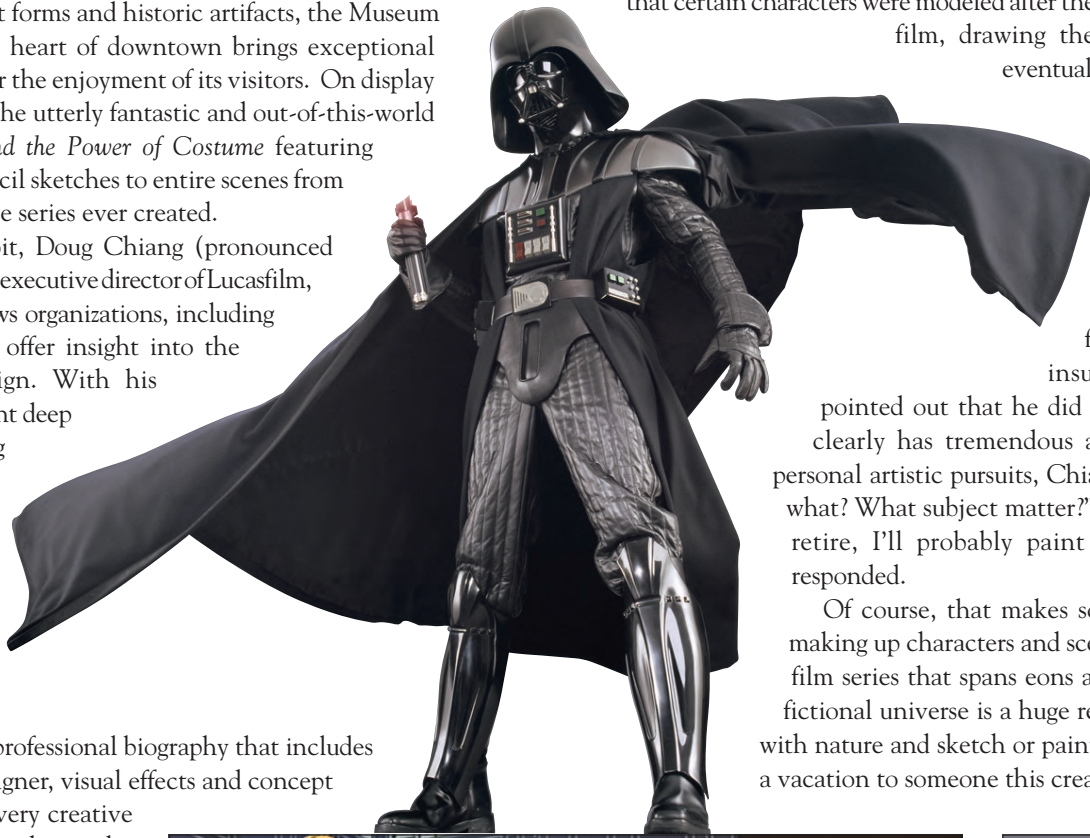
Incredible as it may seem, the *Star Wars* films are told in reverse history, hence the term ‘prequels.’ According to Chiang, George Lucas always considered the films to be documentaries. “He wanted us to figure out the history of why a character looks the way they do and why the set looks the way it does,” says Chiang. “Then we used visual clues to tie the whole universe together.”

The creative process naturally begins with the script, and involves the development of “world, characters, and costumes” into more and more specific, cohesive layers. Chiang himself was responsible for many of the sketches used in production, employing pen and marker by hand, and later on was an early adopter of Photoshop and other forms of digital

media. Asked about the inspiration for some of the characters, Chiang admitted that certain characters were modeled after the actors they hoped to employ in the film, drawing them in the costumes they would eventually wear. “Liam Neeson was the Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn in sketches long before being cast in *Star Wars: Episode 1 Phantom Menace*,” says Chiang.

The filmmaking business gives appreciation to the idea that creativity exists in so many forms that the word “artist” is an insufficient title. In fact, Chiang pointed out that he did not attend art school, though he clearly has tremendous artistic talent. Asked about his personal artistic pursuits, Chiang said, “I draw at home.” “Draw what? What subject matter?” the interviewer pressed. “When I retire, I’ll probably paint wildlife... and forests,” Chiang responded.

Of course, that makes so much sense. To be tasked with making up characters and scenes, designing the entire look of a film series that spans eons and that takes place in an entirely fictional universe is a huge responsibility. To simply commune with nature and sketch or paint what the artist sees is most likely a vacation to someone this creative.



Doug Chiang with characters BB-8, C-3PO, and R2-D2. The force is with him.



R2-D2 and C-3PO

MOFA is the only Florida venue hosting the *Star Wars and the Power of Costume* exhibit. Don’t miss the opportunity to see more than 60 original costumes, including Darth Vader’s sinister black armor. ●

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VISUAL STORYTELLERS *continued from page 1*

even with their 17-month-old daughter Teagan in tow. In fact, Teagan has been to five national parks – enough to earn her a Junior Ranger badge, says Julie. Of course, Teagan has a little ways to go before she catches up with mom, who is proud to say she has 31 badges.

The Branaman’s road trips have taken them to some of the most beautiful, pristine, still-wild places in the US. Julie admits that she’s always loved to travel and camp, but her version of camping had always been somewhat civilized. There was a bathroom and shower on site. “James broke me of that. There is no better view of wilderness than to let go of the need for civilization,” says Julie. “I get to be the Boy Scout I never was,” jokes James.

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT NATIONAL PARKS

Their talent for photography, video and visual storytelling, combined with a passion for nature led the couple to apply for and be accepted into the artist-in-residency program at four national parks: Rocky Mountain National Park in northern Colorado; Mesa Verde National Park in southwestern Colorado; Everglades National Park; and Acadia National Park on the rugged Atlantic coast of Maine. Some 50 national parks offer an artist-in-residency program, which allows visual artists, writers, musicians, composers, and other creative types some ‘time away’ to create while being inspired by nature. The artists stay for free, usually from two to four weeks.

At Rocky Mountain National Park, the Branaman’s stayed in an historic cabin once owned by the newspaper editor William Allen White and visited by luminaries such as Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. The cabin overlooked a river and meadow with elk grazing. “The view was amazing,” says Julie. “We could sit in rocking

chairs on the porch and just look out over everything.” They took dozens of photographs, including a series of the park after dark using a photographic technique called light painting. “We hold open the shutter for about 30 minutes and then take a high-beam flashlight and light up the trees, the stars and surrounding structures,” says Julie. The result is a spectacular, otherworldly work of art. They’ve done a series of ‘after dark’ paintings at all of the national parks where they’ve stayed.

“At Mesa Verde, we got access to the cliff dwellings at sunrise, before the tourists arrived,” says Julie. “It was magic, simply stunning. A sunrise light like no other.”

During their stay in the Everglades, they saw a Florida panther and camped for three nights at Dry Tortugas, which is only accessible by sea plane or boat. “We were the only ones camping there at that time besides the rangers,” says Julie. “Getting there, the sea plane was low enough for us to look down into the water and see sharks, sea turtles, and old wrecks.”

Teagan joined her parents at her first artist-in-residence experience last October at the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast in Sarasota County. The family stayed for two weeks in a restored 1931 carriage house at Bay Preserve in Osprey. “We combined James’ aerial photography with my microphotography on a project called *Near & Far*,” says Julie.

CONSERVATION PASSION

The couple have also done their share of conservation work, whether it’s raising awareness about sea turtles through photographs taken at Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge near Melbourne Beach, or photographing rescue efforts of dolphins by individuals at Clearwater Marine Aquarium. James has also participated in a tour of White Oak Conservation, a 600-acre wildlife training and research facility for exotic





animals in Yulee in northern Florida. “All of our conservation work is self-funded,” says Julie. “We feel compelled to make pictures to raise awareness about environmental conservation and endangered species. There is so much work to do.”

James and Julie met in college at Western Kentucky University, which has a highly regarded photojournalism program. James grew up in Kentucky and Julie hails from Ventura County in California, 30 minutes from Santa Barbara. They share a passion for looking at the world in a visual, artistic way and a love for travel. “We shoot photos differently, but we have always been storytellers first. We like getting the nugget of the story in visuals,” says Julie. Their first

collaboration as photographers was a spring break college trip to the Mississippi Delta to photograph the bayous and the people of the deep south.

After college, they relocated to Seattle, where James worked full-time as a photojournalist and Julie was an independent freelancer. After a couple of years, they decided to ‘pack up their life’ and move hundreds of miles across the country so Julie could take a job with the *Tampa Tribune*. This time James was the freelancer. “One of us always had a full-time job while they other worked independently,” says Julie.

When the *Tampa Tribune* began experiencing financial trouble, Julie was recruited by 83 Degrees Media, an online weekly newsmagazine showcasing Tampa Bay. Then earlier this year, Julie left that publication to strike out on her own full-time with James. “We’ve always collaborated on projects, so it made sense,” says Julie. “Now we have clients who seek us out specifically because we work well as a two-person team. We do everything from concept and shooting to post-production and editing.”

THE DRONES ARE COMING

One of the unique specialties that James and Julie offer is 360-degree aerial visuals using drones. Drones are the newest technology in the visual storytelling field and the Branaman’s are one of the pioneers in using it. “When James first talked about how he wanted a new perspective, a new way to take photos and video, I wasn’t so sure. He loves technology, but I was desperate to keep our cameras on the ground,” jokes Julie. They looked at a variety of options, even considering hot air balloons, and eventually bought a kite, but not just any ordinary kite. This one was four-foot by five-foot. In 2015, James started flying drones as a hobby and then passed the FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certification exam in 2016 – the first day it was offered. “We call it the big insect,” says Julie. “When we’re on location using it, Teagan often can hear it buzzing before we do and points to the sky as it’s flying overhead. We joke that James is Commander Branaman, remote pilot in command.”

For several years now, Visit St. Petersburg-Clearwater – the region’s tourism bureau – has hired them to produce short, fun, birds-eye view videos of everything from local craft breweries and the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, to sailing over the Gulf of Mexico and St. Pete’s Firestone Grand Prix. “360-degree aerial photography with the drone really immerses the viewer into the experience. It gives people a feel for what it’s like to be here,” says Julie.

On a beautiful day in November, I went to Pass-A-Grille Beach with the family to watch James launch the drone, about the size of a small remote controlled race car. While James stood on the pier and concentrated on the drone’s flight path, Julie, Teagan, and I walked on the beach. At the water’s edge, Teagan found a live conch with the little critter half-way out, eyes protruding, ready to do battle. She bravely reached out and touched it, but just as eagerly agreed to put it back safely in the water.

Back at home in the Old Northeast, you’ll usually find the Branamans at the downtown waterfront where they ride, run, walk, and ride bikes. They also have a surfboard-type boat that they launch from North Shore Park or Coffee Pot Park. “It unfolds to 10 feet and we can put a motor on it,” says Julie. There’s adventure waiting around every corner. ●

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NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF COMMUNITY... 1911-2011

ST. PETE'S JEWEL ON TAMPA BAY

Rick Carson, editor • nsnaeditor@aol.com



We want to share our neighbors' thoughts about what it means to be neighborly in The Historic Old Northeast. Send your thoughts about The Historic Old Northeast (100 words or less) to nsnaeditor@aol.com. Won't you join us?

In addition to all the special and unique stories we hear of neighbors being neighborly, we can't overlook those basic everyday examples that – mixing a couple metaphors – are the grease that keeps our gears moving and the glue that keeps us together. We exchange sets of house keys with one another so in case of emergencies we're prepared. We share tools and equipment and lend a hand with projects. We notice packages left on a neighbor's front porch that may need to be secured.

"Hey, can I borrow a couple eggs?" We watch and feed one another's pets and water plants when away on a trip. A hurricane's coming and we help secure the windows. We exchange news about what's happening in the neighborhood that it helps to know.

Connection. Community. Sort of like PDA: Public Displays of Affection. We can call it KAN: Kindly Acts of Neighborliness. Might even become contagious!

Rick Carson



HONNA invites and encourages you to stay connected and on top of programs, events, and other happenings in our neighborhood. Want to learn more about the neighborhood, become involved, share ideas, learn about events and dates of Porch Parties, and provide feedback? Use social media and 'Share' and 'Like'

us at www.facebook.com/honnaorg.

WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED:

- Visit www.honna.org
- Become a HONNA member. You'll receive periodic informative email announcements. honna.org/get-involved
- Volunteer for a project, program, or event (the Candlelight Tour of

Homes, Trunk or Treat, Porch Parties, Crime Watch). Contact Nikki Taylor at volunteers@honna.org.

- Follow Historic Old Northeast Forever at www.historicoldnortheast-forever.org. HONF works "to preserve and protect our special neighborhood" (HONF is not affiliated with HONNA).



RECORD ATTENDANCE AT CANDLELIGHT HOME TOUR!

The Candlelight Tour of Homes, HONNA's signature annual event, celebrated a milestone twentieth year on Sunday, December 10th, with its largest attendance ever – almost 1300! Offering a varied array of eight homes – each distinctive and all capturing the character of The Historic Old Northeast – the

architectural details, interior design, and decor provided unlimited ideas for those seeking inspiration. And the brisk-but-sunny afternoon offered a respite from our recent warmth to provide the perfect overcoat weather to get into the holiday spirit. At dusk, luminaries lined the walkways to the homes while block after block throughout the neighborhood were ablaze in seasonal splendor.

The thanks for making the experience a reality go to Tour chair Melissa Clark and co-chair Shawne Angelle, the Tour committee, and over 100 neighborhood volunteers. But, there would not have been a Tour without the generous neighborliness of the homeowners who opened their residences to the record number of

guests. This year's homeowners are:
Sue Blanshan & Barbara Smith
Boyce Guest House
Drs. Nicole & Steve Cohen
Brittany Cohill
Whitney & Ben DeLozier
Ann Goldman
Joan & Kent Ulrich
Martha & Jeff Wyatt

More thanks are in order:

- Jerry and MJ Robinson of Robinson Brand Builders, the dozens of Tour advertisers, along with artist Robert Holmes made the colorful Tour booklet a perfect souvenir of the day.
- Westminster Palms was once again Ground Central as the site of the preview party, while serving as the Tour kickoff location and beautiful hospitality venue.
- The Vesper Bells handbell ringers from the Lutheran Church of the Cross – which played outside the Boyce Guest House – and has provided beautiful holiday music year after year for the Tour.
- Advance ticket outlets at businesses within the neighborhood and the city provided convenient locations to purchase tickets in advance.

As residents of The Historic ONE shared the spirit and hospitality of the holiday season with other neighbors and visitors from near and far, a portion of the proceeds of the Tour will be allocated among local charity organizations to thank them for their ongoing service to our community.



NEIGHBORS SHARE HOLIDAY CHEER IN THE OLD NORTHEAST

Several score of neighbors took a break from the craze of the holly-daze to gather at the Old Northeast Tavern on Monday evening, December 18th, for tasty food and warm friendship. The annual HONNA holiday party featured the Tavern's popular stone-roasted pizzas along with the usual varieties and salad. Guests were encouraged to bring unwrapped toys and books for kids, to be donated to a local organization. The Christmas Toy Shop on 16th Street North was the grateful recipient of the treasures. This non-profit all-volunteer group has been operating since 1921, providing new and refurbished toys to the less fortunate.

Thanks to the Tavern for being our welcoming host and to all the residents who shared in celebrating the season.



NOVEMBER "BEFORE" AND "AFTER" PHOTOS



November Star Award winner "Before" photo
757 2nd Street North



November Star Award winner "After" photo
757 2nd Street North



November Star Award winner "Before" photo
1175 Locust Street NE



November Star Award winner "After" photo
1175 Locust Street NE

DECEMBER "BEFORE" AND "AFTER" PHOTOS



December Star Award winner "Before" photo
116 13th Avenue NE



December Star Award winner "After" photo
116 13th Avenue NE



December Star Award winner "Before" photo
226 25th Avenue North



December Star Award winner "After" photo
226 25th Avenue North

SHINING STARS

In an effort to honor Old Northeast homeowners for preserving or updating their home or property, and for investing the extra dollar to keep the character and history of their homes intact, HONNA has been recognizing them with the Neighborhood Star Award. Going forward, every month yard signs will be placed on properties to indicate an award. Watch for new stars in the neighborhood monthly, and you'll be able to find them posted on www.honna.org in addition to HONNA's Facebook page. We invite you to be a part of this effort so please feel free to nominate a neighbor or a refurbished property in the Old Northeast you admire. Have a home to honor? Send the information to Charleen McGrath at treasurer@honna.org.

HONNA 2017-18 BOARD MEMBERS ELECTED

HONNA held its election of new board members at its November quarterly meeting on November 13th. Nine returning members were re-elected and four new residents joined the board: Angie Chevalier, Ben DeLozier, John Duda, and John Johnson. Then at the December board meeting, the following were elected officers: Natalie DeVicente (president); Troy Taylor (vice president); Charleen McGrath (treasurer); Ben DeLozier (secretary).

The board and neighborhood thank these residents who served on the board during 2017 and chose not to run for re-election: Melissa Clark, Sarah Craig, Kris Hibl, and Nikki Nate (secretary). Each provided helpful input to the board and service to the neighborhood. Their contributions are sincerely appreciated. Here are the board members for this year (see photo on the next page):

Rick Carson (Cherry Street NE) was editor of the association's newsletter from 2002-2016 and currently edits the HONNA page in the *Northeast Journal*. This is his twelfth year serving on the board. He moved to Pinellas County in 1989 and has lived in the neighborhood since 2001. Since living in the area, he has volunteered as a reading tutor, delivered Meals on Wheels, coordinated an AIDS Buddy program for Catholic Charities in the county, and served on the City's Social Action Funding Committee. Rick currently volunteers as editor of the United Church of Christ's Florida bi-monthly newsmagazine.

Angela Chevalier (16th Avenue NE) has been a resident of the ONE since 2013, having lived in Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Ohio. She currently spends her time on the medical mission field worldwide, recently in Bolivia and Nigeria, with an occasional trip transporting children from Third World countries who need open heart surgery from the US back to their home country. A lover of historical architecture, gardening, and the arts, she loves living here. She has three grown children, a bicycle, and an active dog.

Ben DeLozier (19th Avenue NE) relocated to the ONE in 2015 with his wife, Whitney, and two children. They are stewards of a 100-year-old Craftsman house which they reconditioned in 2017. This will be his first year serving on the board. In addition to a career in finance and management consulting, his community service efforts include Boy Scouts of America, Love Kitchen (food bank), the Boys and Girls Club, Victory Ventures (shelter), and the Memphis Institute of Leadership and Education.

Natalie DeVicente (18th Avenue NE), a resident of the ONE since 2012, is a third-generation St. Pete native. She also serves on the board of trustees for the St. Petersburg Museum of History and the Junior League of St. Petersburg, and is a volunteer with other local non-profits. Natalie is the owner/broker of the boutique real estate firm, Southern Roots Realty, where she incorporates her love for St. Petersburg history with her expertise in real estate, specializing in properties with great historical elements and unique architecture. She resides in a home built in 1925 with her wonderful husband, Logan (a fifth-generation St. Pete native who grew up in the Old Northeast), and their children.

John Duda (19th Avenue NE) is owner and CEO of Summit Exercises and Training, founded in 2013. He has lived in the ONE since 2014 and in Florida most of his life. Prior to moving back to Florida in 2014, he lived in Washington, DC, and worked for the US Department of Energy. John has been employed as director of operations for a medical company located in Jacksonville, in special projects for the Port of Jacksonville, and served Publix Super Markets for 12 years in roles that include heading HR for a region that spanned three states. John has been involved in various communities where has served on advisory councils, as a basketball coach for multiple public schools, and on loan to the United Way.

John Johnson (6th Avenue NE) and his husband, Tom, bought their home in the ONE over five years ago, having moved here from Brooklyn, NY, with their dog Sam. They have spent the last five years renovating and restoring their 1922 home which needed a lot of TLC

Continued on page 14

HONNA NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS *continued from page 13*

and is finally nearing completion. John works at USF/St. Petersburg and greatly enjoys his morning bicycle commute along the waterfront. They really love living in such a beautiful and historic neighborhood and being able to walk to downtown with all of its bars, restaurants, and nightlife.

Charleen McGrath (18th Avenue NE) had jobs with medical device companies which moved her from the east coast to the west coast and places in between. Then she decided to put down some roots in St. Petersburg. Along with her husband, Bob Young, Charleen, a Maryland native, settled in the ONE in 2008. Drawn by the styles of the houses, the age of the homes, plus the proximity to downtown, they enjoy life in their circa-1926 home. Recently, Charleen along with some members of her book club formed the Star Recognition program honoring neighborhood homeowners for preserving, updating, or renovating their homes and yards, and also is involved with HONNA's Historic Preservation Committee. Charleen has been the treasurer of HONNA since April 2016.

Peter Motzenbecker (10th Avenue N) has lived in the ONE for 15 years and in the St. Petersburg area for over 25 years. Originally from New Jersey, Peter is a regional director for Pacific Life. Peter and wife, Doly, love the character of the Old Northeast: its homes and tree-lined brick streets, walkability to downtown, and all St. Petersburg has to offer. He is immediate past-president of HONNA.

Robin Reed (16th Avenue NE) and her husband, Joe, are the proud owners of one of the 11 historic landmarks in The Historic Old Northeast. As chairman of HONNA's Historic Preservation Committee, she spearheaded the Children's Education Project, resulting in publication of *Souvenir of St. Petersburg: Views from the Vinoy*. Robin also participated in updating our Neighborhood Plan. For the past several years she has volunteered at Sunken Gardens, most recently co-chairing the campaign to 'restock the flock' of flamingos at the Gardens. In 2010, she was instrumental in developing the Centennial Sundial Project to commemorate 100 years of our waterfront parks. Robin spent six years on the City's Community Preservation Commission and currently serves on the boards of St. Petersburg Preservation and the Sunken Gardens Forever Foundation.

Troy Taylor (3rd Street N) is a native and lifelong resident of Florida. He and his wife, Nikki, moved into their Old NE bungalow in April 2015... and they never want

to leave. Their daughter joined them here and is a nurse with Largo Medical Center. Troy has a Bachelor's degree in physics and a BSEE and is currently the Global product director at AAMP Global in Clearwater. When they are not working on renovations, Nikki and Troy like to explore all the amazing options for dining and entertaining in the area. And on the rare occasion when he has a few hours and the wind is right, you can find him kayak fishing in the Bay.

Kent Ulrich (1st Street N) and his wife, Joan, moved into an historic home in the ONE in September 2014. They are excited to be living in the neighborhood, as they enjoy the interactions with neighbors and the closeness to downtown St. Pete and to the City's great waterfront parks. Kent was first elected to the board in 2014. Since 2013, he has served as a volunteer counselor with SHINE, an organization which helps seniors and disabled persons with their health insurance needs, particularly with Medicare and Medicaid. Before moving to the ONE, Kent and Joan lived in Indian Shores and Clearwater for a total of 30 years; they have two grown sons. He is a retired electronics engineer who enjoys traveling, reading, walking, kayaking, and biking.

Jay Weisberg (18th Avenue NE) is originally from New Jersey. Jay and Cathy have owned their home in the ONE for over six years and have made it clear that they never want to live anywhere else. Jay's professional background is in engineering and construction, having worked all over the world managing a wide variety of construction projects. Retired now and hoping to find more leisure time, his interests include motorsports, golf, and spectator sports, particularly his Yankees and NY Giants. Cathy and Jay especially enjoy the beach lifestyle, dining out and are looking forward to traveling again. They have three children, seven grandchildren, and a brand-new cat named Nick. A former school board member and local activist in New Jersey, Jay has participated in a number of HONNA activities as a volunteer, membership chair, and HONNA representative to the citywide Council of Neighborhood Associations.

Kimberley Wolfe (1st Street N) has lived in the Old Northeast for over 14 years with her two cats, Dash and Cadia. Originally from St. Louis, she moved here from the Chicago suburbs. The historic features and friendliness of the ONE, plus the proximity to downtown, are her favorite things about the neighborhood. Kimberley has volunteered for numerous neighborhood events and serves on several HONNA committees. ♦



Front: Rick Carson, Charleen McGrath, Troy Taylor, Robin Reed, Peter Motzenbecker, and Angela Chevalier. Back: John Johnson, Kimberley Wolfe, Ben DeLozier, Natalie DeVicente, John Duda and Kent Ulrich. Inset: Jay Weisberg

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A TREASURE HUNT

Finding the Tree

Linda Dobbs

There is a famous tree in the Old Northeast that most everyone knows. It usually blooms in February when nothing else does, so that makes it really stand out. It is on the main street along Coffee Pot Bayou, which also helps it gain fame. It is a really big tree – as tall as the many oaks in the area. There have been photos of it in the *Northeast Journal*, the *Tampa Bay Times*, Facebook, and even YouTube!

Typically, all the leaves fall off in January and the pinkish purple, yellow-centered trumpet-shaped blooms begin to open in February, staying on the tree for most of the month. Do you think you have seen it? Maybe you have, but did you know there are at least four others in the Old Northeast? Do you know where they are?

Welcome to the hunt! The first person who can come up with the name of the tree and the correct spelling, as well as finds the location of all five trees, wins the contest! The prize is your photo in the next issue of the *Journal*. Of course, we will print the answers, too, so you can go find them all in case you didn't the first time.

Now, here are the clues for the five specimens of the tree. Only the first three of the five trees have bloomed so far and even the mature ones may not



be blooming when you first get the paper, so be patient! Apparently the tree has to grow up somewhat (five to seven years) to show off!

1. The famous Coffee Pot tree, which is 60-70 feet tall with a similar width. (Hint: it is north of the Snell Isle bridge.)
2. The really large tree behind an animal 'business' on the east side of Fourth Street NE. It can only be noticed when in bloom. The video-lighted sign by the street side of the building detracts from the beauty of the hidden tree. But, the tree is there and can also be viewed from the alley.
3. The medium-sized tree on the west corner of Beach Drive and a teen-numbered street. It is planted between

the numbered street and the sidewalk. These are slow-growing trees so this will be taller in the next five or ten years.

4. The smallish tree, grown from a seedling of the 'mother' tree, hasn't bloomed yet – but maybe this year? It was planted five years ago in a conspicuous and roomy area of a local garden. There is a fee to see this public garden, which is one of the oldest roadside attractions in Florida – so it's a perfect place for our wonderful tree!
5. The really small tree (another seedling from the mother tree) was planted in a neighbor's yard three years ago. Unless it is blooming this year, it will be tricky to find, but it is not far from its mother. While

admiring the mother tree from Coffee Pot, walk south, turn right at the next street, go half a block (just one house), and then turn right again at the busy road. Walk west, staying on the north side of the road and cross the alley. Then keep looking, more at eye level – not up, and you will spot the tree standing proudly in the side yard of an historic Mediterranean home.

Speaking of seedlings, one was given to a neighbor who potted it, coddled it, and enjoyed the blooms for several years. When it needed to go into the ground, they donated it to the City of St. Petersburg. It was planted in a nearby park with a lake and bloomed for several years. It was visible even from busy 22nd Avenue until, sadly, one day a windstorm toppled it. So now it cannot be on the tree treasure hunt. However, there are numerous seedlings in the Old Northeast and more have been planted elsewhere in St. Petersburg, Tampa, and beyond!

The species originates in South America, particularly in Brazil. But, it has been spotted even in Chile, as evidenced in a photo sent by a friend from that country. It does only grow in warm climates, so forget trying to plant it up north! The 'owner' or caretaker of the tree readily hands out seedlings to anyone interested. ●



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Finding Her Heart's Calling In a Second Career

Holly Walker

How many times have you questioned your career path? As we mature, we often think about finding a job that is more rewarding, does more to help others, or would make a difference for our community or society. But how many of us would be willing to actually take that risk once our careers are firmly established and successful? The Rev. Dr. Dawn Conti, the new senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church on Beach Drive, was willing.

When I asked Rev. Conti what gave her the inspiration, courage, and confidence to answer a call to ministry and change careers, she responded: "Soren Kierkegaard says that life is lived forward, but understood looking back." Looking at her own life, she says she is able to see now that she wrestled with the decision to become an ordained minister for many years before finally answering the call. In fact, she first felt the stirring of a call to pastoral ministry when she was in college. Dawn says that she always knew deep in her heart that someday she would serve the Lord and help others find faith.

Dawn was raised in a faithful, loving family with parents and grandparents who were educators. Her mother was a teacher, and also founded and directed a Lutheran preschool. Her father was an elementary school principal who always wanted one of his children to earn their doctorate degree. She grew up in a suburb of Cleveland, OH until 1978 when her family moved to Florida, the state she now calls home. After high school, Dawn attended Rollins College in Winter Park, where she received a Bachelor's degree in business. She later received an MBA from Drexel University in Philadelphia.

Dawn's husband, Kevin, also has a business degree, and the two started their careers in Greensboro, NC, where their daughter, Emily, was born. Later, the family moved to Jacksonville to be near Dawn's parents. Their youngest daughter, Kate, was born there and the Contis began attending the local Presbyterian Church. Dawn was active with the church, and a volunteer position as pastoral associate was created for her. She also served as a chaplain in



Dawn Conti with parishioners at First Presbyterian Church on Beach Drive



a local Baptist Hospital. It was during this time that she discovered she loved to preach and felt that this would ultimately be her primary gift.

Eventually, Dawn took a leap of faith. She had prayed long and hard about it, and now decades after she experienced the first call to ministry, she decided it was time. It would not be easy for her family to pick up and move to a new city. Her daughters were just three and five at the time, and her husband would need to find a new job. These were difficult but exciting times for Dawn as she made her personal commitment to both herself and her faith. Fortunately, her family was very supportive.

Dawn applied to and was accepted to several seminary schools around the country. Then fairly late in the process, a liaison with the Presbyterian ministry suggested she apply to Louisville Seminary in Kentucky. Initially, she was frustrated with the last-minute suggestion, but completed the application anyway. She was surprised and blessed to receive a full-merit scholarship, which would pay for her three years of school and living expenses.

The family was living in Jacksonville at the time, and decided to put their home on the market in anticipation of the move to Louisville. The school had invited Dawn to visit the campus during Thanksgiving break. As soon as Thanksgiving dinner was over, Dawn and Kevin left the girls with her parents, and drove to Louisville. While they were there, they looked at several houses with a real estate agent, but without much success. At the last minute, in what would be a serendipitous moment, the agent drove them by a lovely home that he said belonged to a recent widow and was not yet on the market. They decided to go ahead and make an offer on the house contingent to the sale of their home in Jacksonville. The very next day, they received an offer on their home. "God's timing was perfect," says Dawn. There were further blessings as well. Kevin got a promotion working for Blue Cross Insurance.

After receiving her degree from Louisville Seminary, Dawn launched her second career as a pastoral minister at Kanapaha Church, a small

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congregation of 100 members in Gainesville. She served there for 14 years. During this time, she completed a three-year program at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and graduated with a doctorate of ministry in preaching. She also became involved with Macedonian Ministries, an organization providing support, education and renewal to pastors around the country and in Scotland. Through Macedonian Ministries, she was blessed to receive a two-week, all-expenses paid spiritual retreat and pilgrimage to Israel in 2014. She traveled to Galilee and Jerusalem, where she spent time with other pastors and learned about the area from a biblical archeologist and Palestinian guide. Dawn said the trip was transforming and made it even clearer that she was following the right path.

Last year, Dawn decided it was time to search for a new experience, and prayed for a church in Florida as both her daughters, her mother, and her two brothers and their families live in the state. Her prayers were answered when First Presbyterian on Beach Drive hired her last fall as the church's first female senior pastor. The church has over 700 members, three worship services, a multitude of educational programs, and an active ministry in the community. She says the new congregation has been very welcoming, loving, and accepting, and she feels truly at home. She is convinced her second career is all part of God's plan as she utilizes her first career skills in business every day as she serves her congregation. ♦



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 - Galileo Galilei

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE ARTS



Jon Hair with his one of his many sculptures



The new, expanded sculpture museum to open this month



St. Petersburg Opera's Stephanie Jabre sings at Season Sparkle

Sara W. Hopkins

SCULPTURE MUSEUM EXPANDS, MOVES TO NEW LOCATION

Another cool museum will soon join the Morean Arts Center and the Chihuly Collection in the 700 block of Central Avenue. Congratulations to Old Northeast resident Jon Hair, an internationally known award-winning sculptor whose new expanded St. Petersburg Sculpture Experience is expected to open next door to the Chihuly this month. The *Northeast Journal* profiled Jon, his interesting life experiences (former drummer for Jimi Hendrix), and his third career as a sculptor at age 50 in the January/February 2017 issue.

Jon has major aspirations for his new museum. "I want to leave a legacy here in St. Petersburg, the place where I grew up," he says. When it opens, the St. Petersburg Sculpture Experience will have a total of 3,200 square feet and three spacious galleries. His famous 26-foot snarling lion will be featured, along with 18 historic figures, including Mark Twain sitting on a porch. He's also unveiling several new pieces.

Despite St. Petersburg' reputation as an artist's haven, Jon points out that it's still a long, difficult road for artists to get started. But he encourages them to get started anyway. "Go ahead and do it," he says. "Know it may be a struggle, but don't let people



Volunteers with Southeast Guide Dogs were the first to listen to the new audio tour of local murals.

discourage you. Block off three hours on a Saturday and do it, whatever it might be. We all have 24 hours in our day. The question is what are you going to do with your 24 hours?"

VIRTUAL MURAL ARTS TOUR

St. Pete's incredible collection of urban art murals has now achieved another milestone. The St. Petersburg Arts Alliance recently launched a virtually accessible audio tour of 40 select murals, allowing visually impaired individuals to enjoy the creativity of this unique art form. Each of the murals is described in vivid, detailed language and includes information about the artist who created it.

According to John Collins, director of the St.

Petersburg Arts Alliance and an Old Northeast resident, this may be a first for this unique form of public street art. The audio tour can be heard via the internet with a hand-held device or computer, making it available anywhere in the world. The St. Petersburg Arts Alliance undertook the project in collaboration with local playwright Sheila Cowley, who helped write the script, and actress Eugenie Bondurant, whose voice you may have heard when using the Dali Museum's headphone audio.

"The St. Petersburg Arts Alliance believes our city's murals should be accessible to everyone and this project makes it possible," says Collins. It's hard to imagine, but Collins says there are now more than 500 murals in and around downtown.

ST. PETERSBURG OPERA'S NEW SEASON

St. Petersburg Opera Company, directed by Maestro Mark Sforzini, announces its 12th season lineup with Mozart's *The Magic Flute* in February and Verdi's *La Traviata* – one of the 10 most popular operas of all time – in June. Last year, Sforzini launched several innovative events to make opera more accessible to the public, including Cocktails with the Maestro at the Iberian Rooster restaurant on Central Avenue and Morning with the Maestro at the Museum of Fine Arts. ♦

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MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

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Kelly Syaphay

4th Street North

If a teleporter existed, where would you go first?
Iceland

What decade and place would you like to visit for a day?
If race wasn't an issue back then, it would be 1950s in New York City

Tell us about a significant mentor in your life.
I've met so many women in my line of work; their stories of loss, love, regrets, and success are my inspiration. They are my mentors.

If you were a dog, what breed would you be?
Maltese

What is the most encouraging word or statement you can receive?
If Plan A doesn't work, there are 25 more letters in the alphabet!

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
My height (lol)

What's the best and worst part of your average day?
Best part: my boys. Worst part: I don't think I have one yet.

What do you love most about living in this country?
Freedom of speech

What is your idea of exercise?
Running (I wish I had more time for it.)

If your house was burning and all family and pets were safe, what one thing would you grab?
My mom's very old knitted jacket

What or who inspires you?
My parents

What's your favorite place to meet new people?
At work

If you were elected mayor of this city, what would be your first improvement?
Improve public school education (especially the middle schools)

Ginger or Mary Ann? Pepsi or Coke? Cats or dogs?
Mary Ann, Dr. Pepper, Cats

Best thing about living in this day and age:
Technology

Best thing about living in St. Petersburg:
There is always something to do here.

Best hidden gem in St. Pete:
Get Nailed nail shop

Your favorite childhood book:
Where the Sidewalk Ends

Your favorite restaurant in St. Pete:
Eating at home. My husband is a great cook.

Your favorite quote:
"You're not important enough for me to hate."

Gadget you can't live without:
My cell phone



Debbie Van Solkema

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What's a gadget you can't live without?
I wouldn't want to live without my fidget spinner.

What's your favorite childhood book?
When I was a youth way back before technology, kids read in their leisure time. So I read a lot and could list dozens of books that left an impression on me. But three childhood books that really stand out are *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl, and A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories. Sorry... I couldn't possibly choose just one.

What is something funny that has happened to you?
Something funny is finding myself living in the sunshine city. I had never been to St. Pete when my husband tore his ACL and decided recovering in the Chicago winter was intolerable. Not long after that, we sold our house and were planning our relocation. Even after living here in St. Pete for about 1-1/2 years now, there are some days I still have to pinch myself to believe my life in paradise isn't just a dream.

What is your idea of exercise?
Running

Best hidden gem in St. Pete
The Urban Canning Company

What or who inspires you?
My friends and family inspire me.

What's your favorite restaurant in St. Pete?
I like the food at Noble Crust, the ambiance at Sea Salt, and the view from The Canopy.

What's your favorite quote?
"Not all those who wander are lost."

What is your favorite movie?
If forced to pick an all-time favorite, I think I'd have to go with a classic rom-com like *Notting Hill* because I'm always a sucker for a cheesy romance story.

What is your first thought in the morning?
Phoebe! I usually wake up with my puppy's muzzle in my face.

What is the most encouraging word or statement you can receive?
When my daughter is excited to share news with me she texts me, "Mom!" And I always feel immediate interest for what she has on her mind. Nothing is more encouraging and uplifting to me than my children's joy. It's infectious and it makes my heart sing.

What decade and place would you like to visit for a day?
The year 3000... I enjoy reading about history, but if I had a time machine I would definitely want to visit the future.

If you were a dog, what breed would you be?
A Golden Retriever.

Other than St. Pete, what is your next favorite city in Florida?
Gainesville. I'm a Gator mama!



Ken Betz

73rd Circle NE

If a teleporter existed, where would you go first?
Ireland

What decade and place would you like to visit for a day?
1850, St. Andrews, Scotland to visit old Tom Morris

What were you good at when you were 11?
Skateboarding

Tell us about a significant mentor in your life.
My parents – they taught me to be friendly and helpful to everyone, to respect everyone.

If you were a dog, what breed would you be?
Greyhound

Using one word, what's significant about your life today?
Family

What is the most encouraging word/statement you can receive?
I believe in you.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
Belt size

What's the best and worst part of your average day?
Technology

What do you love most about living in this country?
Freedom

What is your idea of exercise?
Walking 18 holes

If your house was burning and all family and pets were safe, what one thing would you grab?
Some family pictures and my hurricane box

What is your first thought in the morning?
Thank you, God, for all my blessings.

What or who inspires you?
My wife, Donna

What's your favorite place to meet new people?
Mangrove Bay Golf Course

Ginger or Mary Ann? Pepsi or Coke? Cats or dogs?
Mary Ann, Coke, Dogs

Best thing about living in this day and age:
Quick access to resources to gain knowledge

Best thing about living in St. Petersburg:
So much to do every day

Best hidden gem in St. Pete:
Weedon Island

Your favorite childhood book:
Huck Finn

Your favorite commercial:
New York Life Commercials – produced by my wife. Brownie points!

Your favorite restaurant in St. Pete:
Hooks

Your favorite quote:
"It's not over until it's over." Yogi Berra

Your favorite movie:
Caddy Shack



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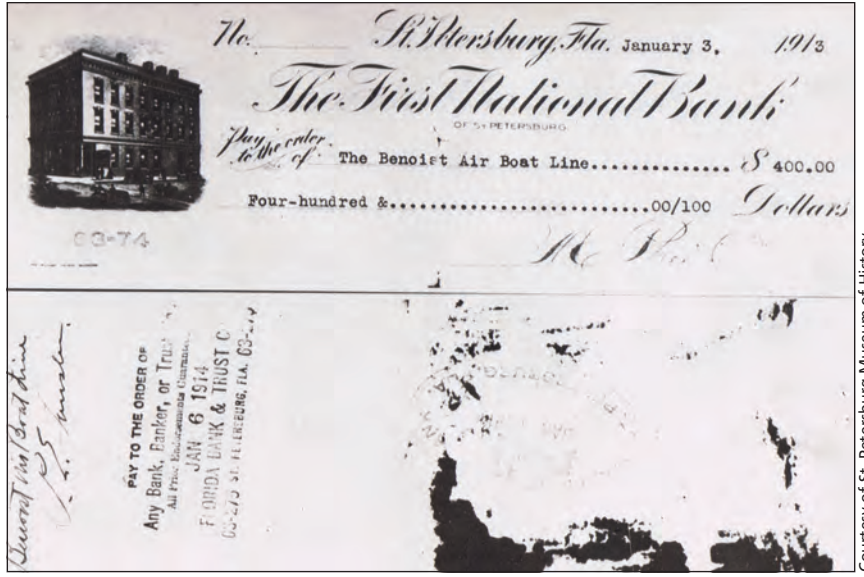
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Courtesy of St. Petersburg Museum of History, circa 1914



Courtesy of St. Petersburg Museum of History

St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line hangar built by the City, with the Benoist Airboat in the foreground, and the Spa in the background. The monument will be erected on this historic site.

Early St. Petersburg Mayor Abe Pheil bid \$400 in a charity to be the first passenger on the First Airline. His check is on display at the St. Petersburg Museum of History.

HISTORY continued from page 1

Fansler enlisted the support of Thomas Benoist (pronounced Ben-wah), an early airplane manufacturer who arranged for the planes – or more precisely, the ‘airboats.’ The airboat was known as the Benoist, named after the airboat’s manufacturer.

The Benoist Airboat was an early version of what we now know as a seaplane, able to take off and land on water. That was a necessity at the time as St. Petersburg had plenty of water but no airports. The Benoist was supplemented a little later by a second airboat. The two airboats made up the airline’s total fleet. The Benoist accommodated one passenger in addition to the pilot. The second airboat was somewhat larger and capable of accommodating two passengers.

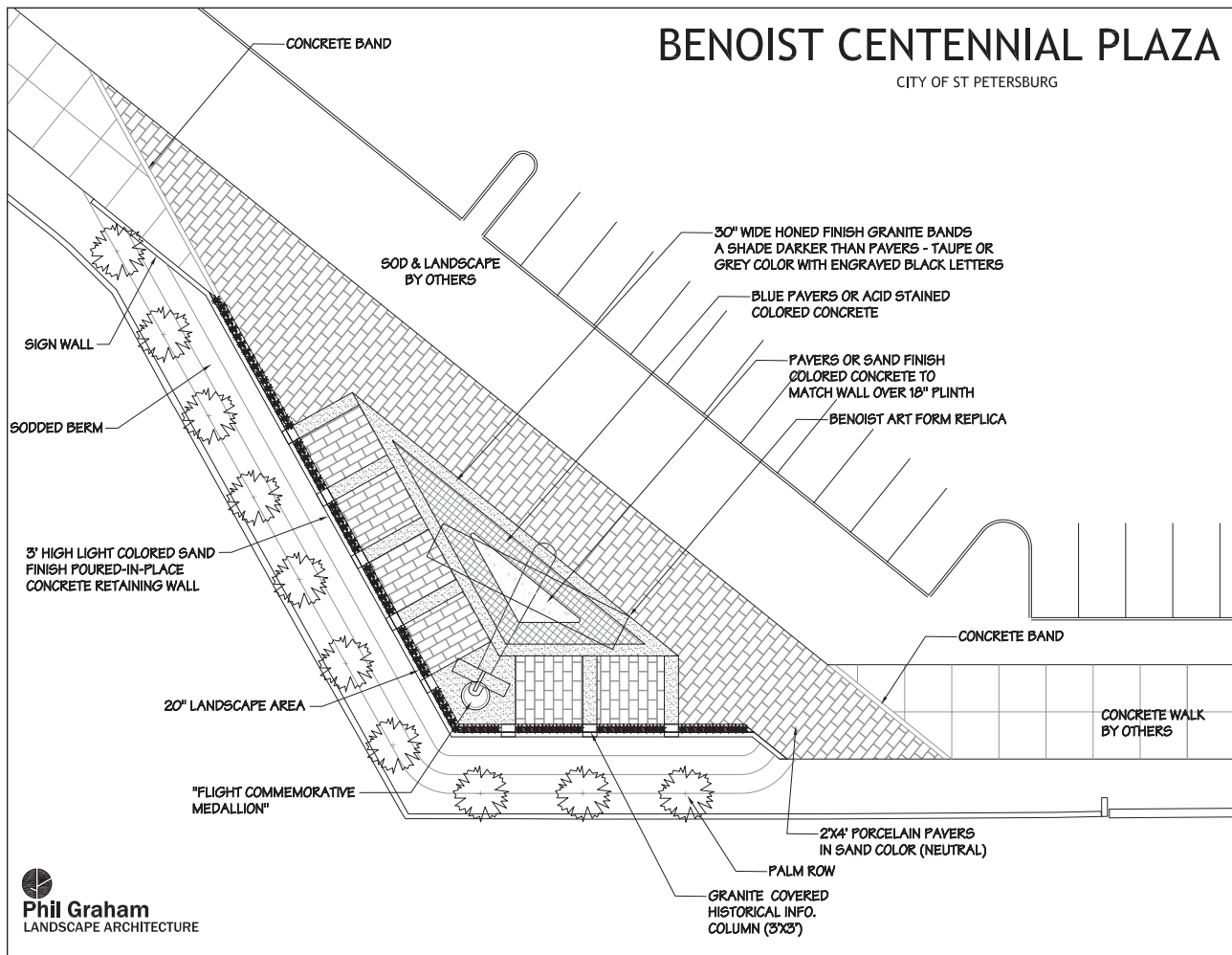


Courtesy of Ron Whitney

The central feature for the First Airline Monument will be a replica of the Benoist Airboat, the first airliner. This is a conceptual rendering.

Thomas Benoist not only provided the airplane, he also provided the pilot, Antony Habersack Jannus. Tony Jannus was a test pilot for Benoist who set early records for passenger flight time, including a record for over-water flight in 1913. He held the first federal airline license and was the pilot when Albert Berry made the first successful parachute jump.

But, this world ‘first’ would never have been possible without the support of the St. Petersburg business community and the city’s government. Percival Fansler, (the brainchild behind the project) needed the backing of Board of Trade manager L. A. Whitney, as well as St. Petersburg businessman and later city mayor Noel Mitchell. He also needed a subsidy to help reduce the financial risk to Tom Benoist.



Courtesy of Phil Graham Landscape Architecture

Concept for the First Airline Monument Plaza. The Plaza will be situated west of the previous Pelican Parking lot at the historic First Airline hangar and take-off site. Features include a berm and palm trees in the background to blend the monument into the park features of the Pier Approach, and blue tile to simulate water for the Benoist Airboat Monument feature.

*“To me,
flying is not the
successful defying of death,
but the indulgence
in the poetry of
mechanical motion,
a dustless, relatively
bumpless, fascinating
sensation of speed;
and abstraction from
things material into an
infinite space;
and abandon that is more
exciting but less irritating
than any other form of
mechanical propulsion...*

*Florida is a live,
wide-awake place
for aviators,
and St. Petersburg
is the best town
for that purpose...*

Tony Jannus, 1914

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Fansler made his proposal to Whitney who immediately pledged \$1200 to subsidize the airline. Whitney then referred Fansler to Mitchell who pledged another \$1000. Mitchell, in turn, gathered 11 additional local investors to pledge \$100 each to start the airline. This group included Lew Brown (publisher of the *Evening Independent*) Perry Snell, George Gandy, and Charles Roser. Mitchell even got the City to build a hangar for the airboat on the north mole of the municipal pier, at the foot of Second Avenue Northeast.

“Tony Jannus Will Make First Flight Thursday,” read the headline of *The St. Petersburg Daily Times* on December 30, 1913. On January 1st, 3000 people gathered to see the first flight of this fledgling airline. This was a huge crowd for the city considering the permanent population was perhaps 7000 at the time. Among the crowd was the humorist Will Rogers who was performing at the Johnny Jones Circus in St. Petersburg. In a charity auction to raffle off the first flight ticket, former St. Petersburg mayor Abe Pheil made the winning bid of \$400 for the privilege of being the first passenger. Percy Fansler was invited to say a few words just prior to the takeoff. “The Airboat Line to Tampa will be only a forerunner of great activity along these lines in the near future... what was impossible yesterday is an accomplishment of today – while tomorrow heralds the unbelievable.”

Jannus then took off, skimming across the bay at a height of 50 feet. After a 23-minute flight, including a stop to adjust the drive shaft, Jannus and his single passenger, Abe Pheil, touched down on the Hillsborough River in Tampa. An even larger crowd of 3500 greeted the Benoist in Tampa. Tampa mayor Donald B. McKay welcomed Jannus and Pheil to the east side of the bay. The return trip took only 20 minutes.

Mayor Pheil was a major figure in St. Petersburg’s early history. Pheil owned the St. Petersburg Novelty Works, which was a building supply and sawmill business. He did much to improve downtown street conditions and was instrumental in bringing natural gas to the city. He served as mayor from 1912-13. Betsy Pheil, Abe’s granddaughter, remembers from family lore that Mayor Pheil tried to keep his sojourn on the world’s first flight a secret from her grandmother. How long this lasted is unknown. Probably not long.

Upon arrival back in St. Petersburg, Jannus dropped his flight goggles, breaking the glass. Ten-year-old Judy Bryan ducked under the rope holding back the crowd. Running up to Jannus, she asked if she could have the goggles. Without hesitation he gave them to her. Then he removed one of the brightly lettered Benoist pennants from the wing and handed that to her also.

Continued on page 24

First Airline Sponsorship Opportunities

- Friend of Flight \$100
- Mayor Pheil Sponsor \$400
- Johnny Green Sponsor \$1000
- Albert Whitted Sponsor \$2500
- Tony Jannus Sponsor \$5000
- Percy Fansler Sponsor . . . \$25,000
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HISTORY continued from page 23

In the weeks that followed, Jannus usually made at least two regularly scheduled round trips a day between St. Petersburg and Tampa, carrying everything from Swift hams to bundles of *The St. Petersburg Daily Times* (the newspaper's name was later shortened to the *St. Petersburg Times*, today's *Tampa Bay Times*). Cost of a passenger ticket was \$5 each way, and \$5 for each 100 pounds of freight. This was not cheap. Five dollars in 1914, adjusted for inflation, is valued at \$123 in 2017. While \$5 a trip was high compared with the cost of rail or steamship, it barely covered the costs of operations. When Tom Benoist was asked how he could cover his costs and make a profit he stated, "There are at present about 30,000 tourists in the area and I believe a great many of them will patronize the airboat line to save time. Besides, I am anxious to demonstrate the capability and practicality of aerial transportation at a price anyone can afford even if such a low rate means a revenue loss to me, for today's loss could very well be tomorrow's profit."

Jannus lauded his time in St. Petersburg. In April 1914, he wrote in *Aero and Hydro* magazine, "All told, we believe that our work has stamped St. Petersburg as the aviation headquarters of Florida, and this is largely due to the hearty cooperation of the city and citizens of the town. There are now hangars that will hold four large [flying] machines and plenty of room to put more, and I must say that Tampa Bay is a fine place to fly in winter."

Finally, as the tourist season wore down, the airline suspended its daily operations on March 31st. The airline continued for another month with a reduced schedule and flights upon request. The last flight was on May 5th. By

the end of March, the airline had carried hundreds of passengers and thousands of pounds of freight without a single accident. The airline did not break even, but came close to it. It appears to have been self-sustaining in two of its three months of operation. In January, it only flew 18 days. The amount of subsidy drawn from the business community ranged between \$540 and \$1740. The exact financial net of its operations is unclear. Given more time for marketing and optimizing operational efficiency, the airline may very well have turned a profit.

While the airline did not quite make a profit, it paid other dividends. As the *Times* reported shortly after the airline was launched, "St. Petersburg is now coming to be known in a way she was never before heard of by people who otherwise would likely never hear of the city." Commenting on the significance of the airline, Tom Benoist, the builder of the Benoist airboat said, "Someday people will be crossing oceans on airliners like they do on steamships today." The airline served as a prototype for the future. Others would build upon the St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line's experience to create the multi-billion dollar aviation business that the world enjoys today.



Courtesy of St. Petersburg Museum of History

Classic photo of the Benoist Airboat, the first airliner, taking off from the Central Yacht Basin, with pioneer pilot Tony Jannus at the controls. Circa 1914.

"The key to understanding any people is in its art: its writing, painting, sculpture."

Louis L'Amour, *Education of a Wandering Man*

FIRST AIRLINE MONUMENT

Several organizations joined together under the banner of 'Flight 2014, Inc.' to plan the 2014 centennial celebrations of the First Airline.

These included the Florida Aviation Historical Society, the St. Petersburg Museum of History, the Tony Jannus Distinguished Aviation Society, and the Chamber of Commerce. Flight 2014 is now seeking to erect a monument to the First Airline. Approval has been obtained from Mayor Kriseman and the city council for the project. The monument will be located on the Approach to the

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New Pier at the site of the original hangar, just west of the previous Pelican Parking area. This will be a high-visibility part of the New Pier Approach.

Ideally, the monument's central feature will be a replica of the Benoist Airboat, the first airliner. St. Petersburg's most noted landscape architectural firm – Phil Graham Landscape Architecture – has donated their services to plan the surrounding Benoist Plaza site. Panels will tell the First Airline story, and a time capsule of historic information is under consideration. A row of palms and a green berm will serve as background to the plaza blending the monument into our waterfront parks. Blue pavers will simulate the water which served as the Benoist Airboat's runway.

An honorary advisory board has been established to support the monument. Prominent among community supporters is Betsy Pheil and the Pheil Family. Betsy is the granddaughter of Mayor Abe Pheil, the First Airline's first passenger. Flight 2014 is seeking to raise half the funds from the airline industry and half from the Tampa Bay community. Donations are now being accepted and sponsors are being sought. Several airlines have already generously donated, including Southwest, American Airlines, and Alaska Airlines. Donations in any amount are most welcome. No city funds are being requested for the monument.

Historic monuments help give cities and other places their unique identity as well as educate the public regarding inspiring events and people. Think Statue of Liberty in New York; St. Louis Gateway Arch; the Marine Corps Imo Jima Flag-Raising Memorial; the Martin Luther King, Jr. Monument; and the Wright Brothers Memorial at Kill Devil Hills, NC. While the proposed First Airline monument is modest by comparison, it too has its importance. Monuments help to mark the spirit of a place. Yes, this is a story of both a Florida-first and a world-first. Yet more importantly, it is a story of the spirit of entrepreneurship worldwide, and a story of the spirit of Tampa Bay – a future-oriented community embracing the latest in innovation, taking a risk on a new idea, and proving the practical value of it all. It is first and foremost an inspiring story of the human spirit, and also a matter of community pride. Monuments are an effective way of making an important story better known and appreciated. While many may read a chronicle about the First Airline, many others will learn by visiting an engaging monument at an historic site. There is something magical about being at the very place where it all began. ●

Will Michaels is the president of Flight 2014, Inc. He may be reached at wmichaels2222@gmail.com or 727-420-9195.

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CAPTURING THE 'BURG continued from page 1



whether it is in Washington, DC; Australia; or even Kisarazu, Japan; where he spent three formative years of his childhood. He remembers in great detail his years there, and shares his experiences with great enthusiasm. When asked what drew him to art, he responds, "Stamp collecting. I lived in Japan from the time I was seven to nine years old. I was a Cub Scout and Air Force brat. As a Cub Scout, you're required to have avocations to earn merit badges. I went to a little mom-and-pop store not far from where I lived and used to admire the marbles they sold. They were made by hand, each with a little animal inside. I thought to myself, 'Someone took a lot of time to make those marbles', and so I began collecting them. But one day, I saw a little box with glassine envelopes containing beautiful stamps inside. I went home, and went through my father's pockets to get as much money as I could find, and I took it back to them. I bought the whole box." He still has the 40,000 stamps.



"It was the artwork that intrigued me," says Robert. "It all started from somebody's artwork. There wasn't a photo reviewer back then, so they had to do this by hand on a steel or copper plate. They were just fabulous with lots of details." He recalls how much art was part of everyday life in Japan. "There is no way you can miss all the calligraphy, designs, fabrics, and details."

Margot adds, "No one taught him how to paint." Robert admits that he doesn't know how the process works either. "I have taken classes, but I already knew the mechanics," he says. "I knew how to put colors together, and I could see ideas already. Usually, I can see something, and I just want to make it happen."

Robert and Margot met while she was working at an attorney's office in Rockville, MD. He was passing out brochures for his art show at the Rockville Civic Center. She attended the show and later commissioned him to do a painting of Myrtle Beach, NC, which still hangs in their condo today.

The couple decided to move from the DC area to Florida after Margot fell and broke her arm in a bad ice storm in 1996. After surgery and over a year of rehabilitation, they moved to St. Petersburg in 1999. Initially, they lived in north St. Pete, but Robert would do what he calls a 'safari' in downtown, checking out every street, every building, getting to know the city inside and out. He and Margot are now happy to live downtown. For six years, he had a studio above Florida CraftArt, but is now happy to be painting in the comfort of his own home. His themes are varied. "I just want to do something that someone hasn't done before," he says. "If it's too repetitive, no one pays attention."

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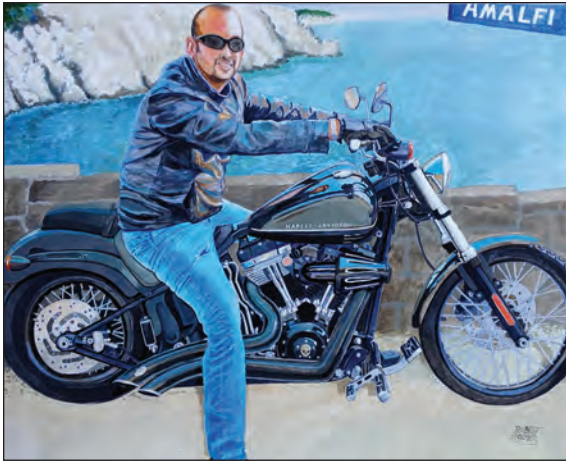
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So what kinds of paintings has he come up with? "One Sunday morning around 8am, when no one was parked on Central Avenue, I went around and took pictures of everything I saw between 2nd and 3rd Streets. I stood on the double yellow line in the middle of the street and took a picture of the Lucky Dill. Then I moved down 20 feet and took another picture. I took 20 pictures from Lucky Dill to Detroit Liquors." Later, he sold many of his Central Avenue paintings at a show at Kahwa Coffee. The remaining paintings are at the Craftman House.

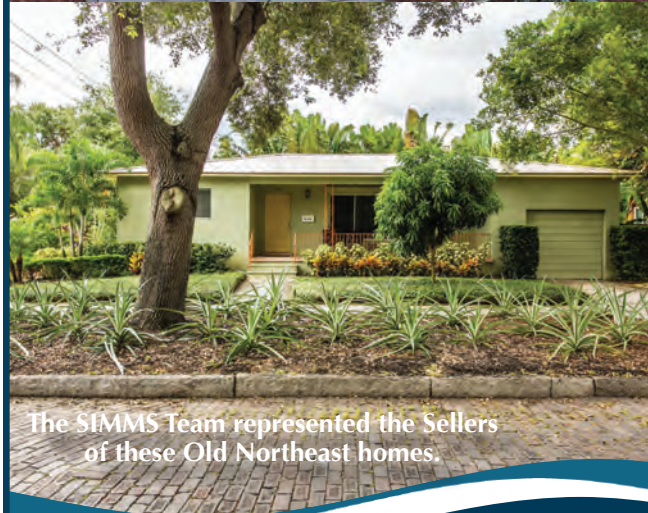
All of the portraits that Robert paints are based on photographs that he takes. "As long as Robert takes the photo, he can paint it. If you just give him a picture, somehow, it's not the same," says Margot. Robert agrees. "My mind's eye has to see it. I have to take the photo myself because then I take the picture the way I want to paint it." Yet rarely does he know what the setting will be for any of the portraits that he paints. "Conjuring something from nothing...that's the excitement of it. I can create something that never existed before and make it real."



It's not surprising that Robert's favorite artist is Edward Hopper, a prominent 'realist' painter, who is known for his cityscapes and architectural paintings. Once, Robert painted a series of 40 pies for a show and donated half of the proceeds to an Alzheimer's organization. He's gone out to St. Pete Beach and painted a series of 25 hotels. They all sold. He also enjoys painting local restaurants. For the past six years, he's been painting The Avenue's Burger of the Month – that's 72 burgers! He's also painted portraits of the staff at Gratzzi Italian Grille, giving each a unique personality incorporating both imagination and individual experiences. Robert decided to make Casey, the owner, a prince, since it was Christmas and he was thinking about the Three Kings. He painted executive chef Tony Mangiafico on his

motorcycle on the Amalfi Coast of Italy.

Robert and Margot Holmes are both retired. Robert says with a smile, "Every day is Friday." He spends his retirement capturing the beauty, architecture, details, colors, and people of the Old Northeast and St. Petersburg in his paintings. ◆



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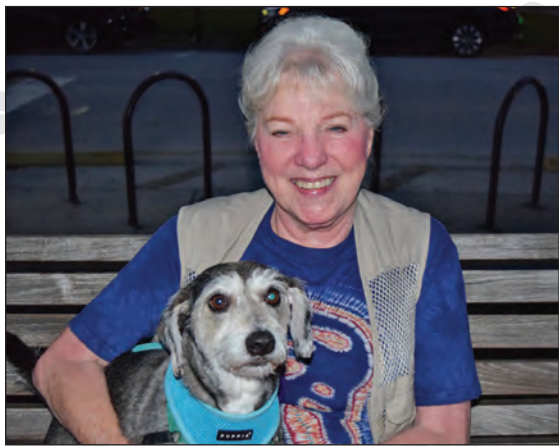
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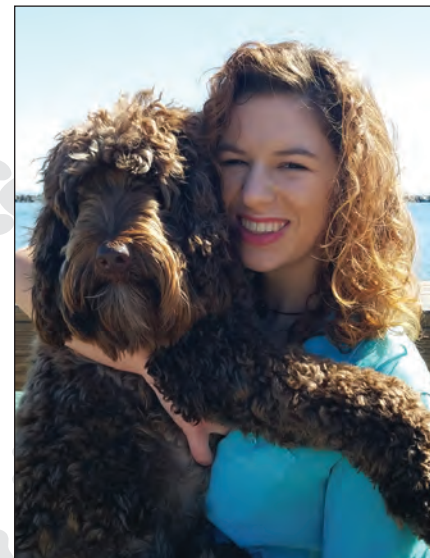
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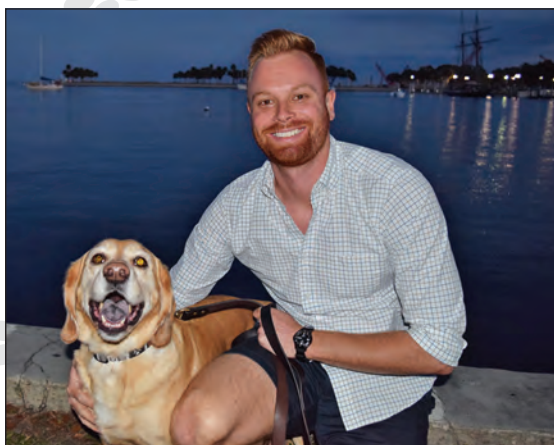
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THE HEART GALLERY

The Heart Gallery provides an emotionally safe way to connect children with families through a traveling exhibit featuring the faces and stories of local foster children ready for adoption. www.heartgallerykids.org.

QUANADRAYVIA, AGE 16

Outgoing, sweet, and kind, Quanadrayvia – who goes by ‘Quana’ – is known to be a good friend and likes to help everyone around her feel included. As a matter of fact, if Quana could change the world, she would make everyone get along. It’s no surprise Quana is thinking of becoming a teacher because she loves to be helpful, especially if there are younger children around. Quana likes most that she is nice and funny. Quana doesn’t care much for television, but she appreciates Netflix. And when she’s really wanting to have a good time, she’ll pull out a book. There’s nothing she dislikes eating, but spaghetti, tacos and chicken are her favorites. Quana’s other favorites include the color red and dogs. Quana’s ideal forever family will be loving and accept her as one of their own.



DFL-11034928 Photo courtesy of Base Camp Photo

KYLE, AGE 15

Passionate about school and JROTC, Kyle sees himself serving in the military someday. In his free time, Kyle enjoys playing on his Xbox, especially military and racing games. He also enjoys playing outside and mowing the lawn for fun. Very polite and helpful, Kyle makes friends easily, and is known to be somewhat of a ladies’ man. But he’s always respectful – something he’s very proud of. Kyle’s favorites include the color blue, pit bulls, tigers and the TV show, *Fairly Odd Parents*. His favorite food is pizza, but he’ll pass on sour cream and onions. What makes Kyle happiest? Love. Kyle needs a forever family that will keep him involved in pursuing his passions while pushing him to achieve his dreams.



YFA-11474009 Photo courtesy of Heart Gallery of Pinellas & Pasco

ADOPTION FAQ

Q: How many children are available for adoption? A: The status of children in foster care changes frequently, however at any given time, approximately 100 children are available for adoption. **Q: How many children are on the Heart Gallery?** A: The Heart Gallery features about 100 children in various stages of the adoption process – from currently available to matched – on our site throughout the year. **Q: Where is the Gallery located?** A: The physical gallery travels throughout Pinellas and Pasco counties. To see current gallery locations, please visit www.heartgallerykids.org/gallery.php. **Q: How many Heart Gallery children have been adopted?** A: We are pleased and proud to have helped more than 325 local children find their forever family and get adopted since 2006. **Q: I think I’m interested, but still have questions. How do I get started?** A: To learn more, consider attending an adoption orientation. To get more information about the orientation, call Diane Johnson at 727-456-0600 Ext. 2085 or email djohnson@eckerd.org. **Q: I can’t adopt, but want to help. What are your needs?** A: We are forming a new Volunteer Program. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Megan Slaughter, megan@heartgallerykids.org or 727-258-4806. The Heart Gallery is an independent, 501(c)3 organization that survives solely on the generous contributions of individuals and businesses. Please consider a donation, which can be made on the Heart Gallery website or by mailed to: Heart Gallery of Pinellas & Pasco; 500 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. St. N, Suite 300; St. Petersburg, FL 33705

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Musical Sing-Alongs Brighten Seniors' Lives

Janan Talafer

Even before Bill Lotkowitz finished setting up his keyboard, the residents of Egret Cove Center were strolling into the dining room, eager to get close to the stage and their favorite musician. Bill kicks off the mini-concert with a few jokes to warm up the crowd. Inconceivably, when he mentions that he's a little Polish kid from the small town of South Amboy, New Jersey, a big strapping guy in his late 70s says he's from there, too.

Before long, Bill has the residents tapping their toes and singing along, some swaying gently in their chair. Music speaks to the soul, and Bill gives them a chance to forget their aches and pains for a short time. It's a few weeks before Christmas and Bill's deep baritone fills the room with popular holidays tunes, especially the residents' favorite: *Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer*.

Christmas songs are just a tiny selection of Bill's vast repertoire, which covers everything from Frank Sinatra favorites like *The Lady Is A Tramp* to Elvis' *Jailhouse Rock* and *Back in the USSR* by the Beatles. Bill has an uncanny ability to 'channel' the style, phrasing, and pitch of many of these legendary singers. "I try to give them a different genre each time I come," says Bill. "Sinatra and Elvis are definitely crowd favorites, but I'll do everything from Jimmy Buffet to the Big Bands and Motown."

Since 2008, Bill has been hosting once-a-month sing-alongs at nursing homes, assisted living centers, and rehab facilities all over Pinellas County, from St. Petersburg to Palm Harbor. He currently visits about 25 places, but at one time had about 35 on his itinerary. Over the years, he's gotten quite emotionally attached to the residents and staff. "This is the most rewarding thing I have ever done," says Bill. "I really love doing this and talking to all of them. I thought I would be playing in bars, and ended up in nursing homes. This is so much nicer."



Bill Lotkowitz with the staff of Egret Cove Center after he performed a concert for residents

After an hour of playing at Egret Cove, Bill starts to pack up so everyone can get ready for lunch, but several residents are eager to hang out and keep talking about music, favorite rock bands, and the hometowns where they grew up. "At one place, there was a 100-year-old woman – sharp as a tack – who would always come in and sit in the front row," says Bill. "At another facility, a man in his 80s asked me to play *Imagine* by John Lennon. I had to learn it first, and when I sang it, he had tears in his eyes." Bill also jokes that he's had at least three marriage proposals. "I had really missed talking to people my parents' age after they passed," says Bill. "I get so much energy from singing to this age group."

Music comes naturally to Bill. He grew up in a musical family and started accordion lessons when he was in first grade. The first year, the lessons were at the Catholic school he attended, and the following year, his uncle Ed took over. By age 13, he stopped reading music and started playing by ear, which he still does. He used to practice by belting out the tunes at home when he and his wife Lynn (a member of the *Northeast Journal* team) lived out at the beaches. Now that they're in a condo downtown, the neighbors might not appreciate that, says Bill. So instead he puts in a CD and practices in the car.

No surprise, Bill was in a rock-and-roll band in high school. Decades later, after he and Lynn had moved from New Jersey to St. Pete, he played keyboards and was a background singer for a local soul, funk, and R&B band called Simple Soul. "We played weekends at Cadillac Jacks, Jimmy B's, the Rare Olive, Cha Cha Coconuts – all of the clubs up and down the beaches," says Bill. The group disbanded in 2006. Two years later, after Bill left his marketing position at Tampa technical college, he wondered

what he would do next. "Lynn said to me, this is the perfect opportunity to do what you love most – music," says Bill. He started playing at nursing homes when his father was ill. After his father passed, Bill continued playing. Word spread and one referral led to another, until it became a full-time opportunity... bringing a little sunshine and music to seniors in Tampa Bay. ●

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