A man with grey hair and a goatee, wearing a light blue dress shirt and a red patterned tie, is playing a golden trumpet. He is seated in a record store, with shelves of vinyl records behind him. The records feature various jazz artists like Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington, and Benny Goodman. The title 'a Slice of Smithfield Summer 2023' is overlaid in white text on the top right of the image.

# a Slice of Smithfield Summer 2023

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### The Music Man

Dru Stowe keeps swing music humming in Smithfield

### Chip off the block

Woodcarver and painter Jim Warren has honed his craft for decades





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**Newcomer's Guide** FEB. 2020

Welcome to the Isle!

As a new resident, you may have some questions about the County and the many services available to you. The following information is designed to help ease your transition into your new home and life in Isle of Wight. If you would like additional information about voting or relocating to Isle of Wight, please stop by our Visitor Center at 319 Main Street or give us a call at 757.357.3191 or visit us at 800.365.3191.

Stay Informed!

- ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY WEBSITE: [www.isle.net](http://www.isle.net)
- ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY SOCIAL MEDIA: [www.isle.net/SocialMedia](http://www.isle.net/SocialMedia)
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- ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY SCHOOLS: 800 West Main Street, Smithfield, VA 23495, 757.357.4393, [www.k12isw.net](http://www.k12isw.net)
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- COMMISSIONER OF THE REVENUE: 757.365.6228, [www.commissioner-of-the-revenue.com](http://www.commissioner-of-the-revenue.com)
- TREASURER: 757.365.6228, [www.isle.net/Treasurer](http://www.isle.net/Treasurer)

REAL ESTATE TAX: The real estate tax in Isle of Wight County is assessed by the Commissioner of the Revenue and collected by the Treasurer. The current real estate tax is \$5 cents per \$100 of the assessed value. Payments should be made to the Treasurer's Office in two installments: the June 30th and December 31st.

PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX: The personal property tax is assessed by the Commissioner of the Revenue and collected by the Treasurer. It includes the assessed value of motor homes, boats and trailers. The current personal property rate is \$4.50 per \$100 of the assessed value. Payments should be made to the Treasurer's Office in two installments: the June 30th and December 31st.

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Courts

- CIRCUIT COURT: 757.365.6223, [www.isle.net/circuit-court](http://www.isle.net/circuit-court)
- GENERAL DISTRICT COURT: 757.365.6243, [www.isle.net/general-district-court](http://www.isle.net/general-district-court)
- JUVENILE & DOMESTIC RELATIONS COURT: 757.365.6222, [www.isle.net/juvenile-and-domestic-relations-court](http://www.isle.net/juvenile-and-domestic-relations-court)
- IWUS.net: 757.357.3191

## NEW TO THE COUNTY?

The Isle of Wight County Newcomer's Guide provides all the information those who are new to the area and residents need on county services, recreational opportunities, elected officials, utilities, emergency services, and much more. The guide is available at the county complex or it can be downloaded from the county's website.

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# a Slice of Smithfield

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# a Slice of Smithfield

## The sounds of summer

As this former trombonist can appreciate, there are at least 76 reasons to like Smithfield's Dru Stowe.

I put down my horn in college some 35 years ago, but Stowe, this issue's cover subject, is still making music — and making the musical arts a priority in Smithfield.

Our Phyllis Speidell chronicles Stowe's musical journey, which continues today with his leadership of the Sundays at Four classical concert series at Christ Episcopal Church and service on the Isle of Wight Arts League Board of Directors. If you haven't met Stowe around Smithfield but he looks familiar, you likely saw him performing at Busch Gardens, where he was a regular for decades.



This issue of Slice also features Stephen Faleski's fun profile of Isle of Wight woodcarver Jim Warren, for whom whittling might be genetic.

It's hard to believe summer has arrived in Smithfield. At this writing, pleasant spring temperatures have lingered into early June, making the haze from the Canadian wildfires a little more bearable.

After such a mild winter and delightful spring, will Mother Nature punish us with brutal summer heat. She just might, but if time keeps flying like it has so far in 2023, fall will be here before we know it.

Steve Stewart



Dru Stowe is a relentless promoter of the musical arts in Smithfield, including directing the Sundays at Four classical music series for the Isle of Wight Arts League.



## Book Review

When President Woodrow Wilson suffered a debilitating stroke, first lady Edith Wilson filled the leadership vacuum.



## A chip off the block

Jim Warren's love of woodcarving came honestly: His grandfather was a whittler.



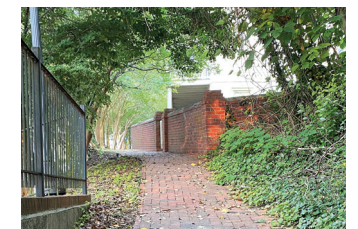
## In History

Smithfield Foods, now the world's largest pork processor, had a product make a global splash in 1933.

## Where Am I?

Can you identify the location of our "Where Am I" photo challenge? If you're right, you'll be entered to win a \$25 gift card.

# 10

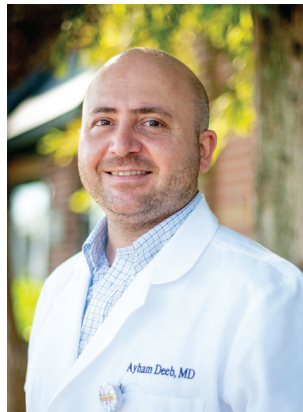






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- **Specialty Markets** 9-12:30, BSV lot, 115 Main St.
- **Pickers Markets** 9 - 1, 2nd Sat.'s, April - Nov, Joyner Field
- **Autumn Vintage Market** 9-4, Sat., Sept. 30, Main Street
- **Mistletoe Marketplace** 3 - 8, Sat., Nov. 18, Main Street
- **Carrollton Christmas Market** 10 - 3, Sat., Nov. 25, Old Point National Bank, Hwy. 17

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## Book Review

# Portrait of a first lady

Virginian Edith Wilson was a power player after husband's stroke

Review by Wilford Kale

This is a Virginia story, played out on the national stage — “Untold Power: The Fascinating Rise and Complex Legacy of First Lady Edith Wilson” (Viking, 320 pgs., \$30) by Rebecca Boggs Roberts.

The principle characters are all Virginians: President Woodrow Wilson was born in Staunton; his second wife, Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, was born and spent her early life in Wytheville; and his presidential physician and “personal friend,” Adm. Cary T. Grayson, was a Culpeper County native and William & Mary alumnus, class of 1898.

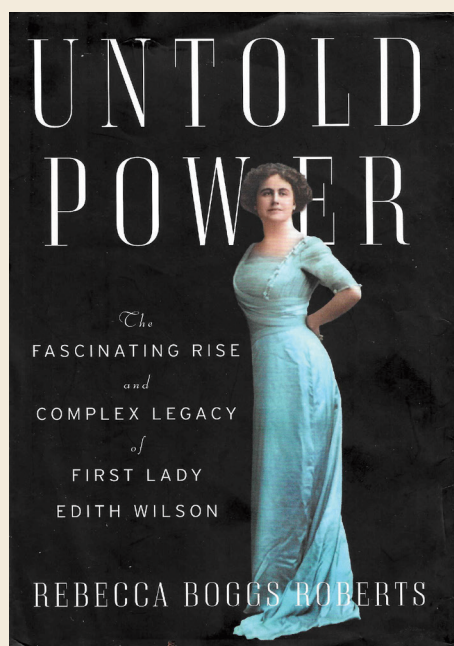
Quickly explained, this story is about how Edith Wilson protected her presidential husband after his stroke and in many ways protected the country from the maze that might have developed had the real level of his disability been known.

She manipulated a nearly inept cabinet, Vice President Thomas Marshall, who didn't want to be a president, and ultimately congressional members who sought to learn just how ill Wilson was.

Edith Wilson's companion in the subterfuge was naval medical officer Grayson, whom Wilson appointed an admiral over scores of other senior officers. He and Grayson traveled together and played golf together on several occasions at the course in what is now the Wythe neighborhood of Hampton.

“Edith was not interested in telling the whole truth,” Roberts explains. “Her entire goal, from the very beginning, was to protect her husband at any cost.”

Joe Tumulty, secretary to the president, and Grayson had the authority, she stresses, “to certify the disability of the president. Both categorically refused to do



so ... Like Edith, (Tumulty and Grayson) were concentrating on how the president could best recover, not how the nation could best be governed.”

Marvelously researched by Roberts, a superb storyteller, “Untold Power” looks at a woman whose complex life has never before been examined in such rich detail, while combining related stories of political figures and socialites of the Wilson era.

Roberts' own background contributed to her understanding and, therefore, skill to examine all facets of Edith Wilson from her talents to her flaws. Her mother was television journalist and author Cokie Roberts, whose mother and father served in the Congress. Her father is Steve Roberts, journalist, writer and political commentator.

Elaine Weiss, award-winning journalist and women's history and political activism

authority, said Roberts “paints a vivid and riveting portrait of Edith, in all her prickly, contradictory splendor.” She adds that the story is told “with gusto, historical care, wry humor and crisp insight.”

In conclusion Roberts explains that annually on Dec. 28 military personnel place a wreath at the grave — the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. — of Wilson. A second wreath, full of orchids, is placed in tribute to Edith. This is mainly because she had the excellent political timing to die on her late husband's birthday.

Some people think that the orchid tribute is there because of her part in his presidency. “As it should,” Roberts writes.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author  
It's time to stop everything and praise Virginia-based author Barbara Kingsolver for her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, “Demon Copperhead” (Harper, 560 pgs., \$32.50).

In announcing the prize recently, the Pulitzer Board said Kingsolver's work is “a masterful recasting of ‘David Copperfield,’ narrated by an Appalachian boy whose wise, unwavering voice relates his encounters with poverty, addiction, institutional failures and moral collapse – and his efforts to conquer them.”

This is the first time in the 105-year history of the awards that there has been a double winner in fiction. Herman Diaz also won the feature Prize for “Trust” (Riverhead Books, 416 pgs., \$28).

Considering “Demon Copperhead,” New York Times critic Molly Young put it succinctly: “It's hard to think of another living novelist who could take a stab at Dickens and rise above the level of catastrophe.”

Likewise, Ron Charles, Washington Post book critic said, “Anyone familiar with Dickens' ‘David Copperfield’ will hear its characters and incidents echoing through these chapters.”

It's hard to beat those kinds of comments and feelings about a work. So, saying what others feel is not wrong. Quite frankly, few reviewers had anything but laudatory comments before the Pulitzer announcement.

Some background is necessary. Kingsolver was born in Maryland and raised around Carlisle, Kentucky. For the past many years, however, she has lived near Meadowview in Washington County, Virginia.

In addition to writing, she and her husband, Steven Hopp, have raised vegetables on their farm and for 15 years from 2007 to 2022 operated a restaurant — Harvest Table — in Meadowview that specialized in locally grown food, vegetables and fruit.

Speaking about Appalachia, an area where she grew up, Kingsolver recalls the

stereotype — people who are “toothless, hopeless, the butt of every job. I live here, that's not who we are. And part of why I write about this place is to counter those stereotypes and show the world a portrait of us with some subtlety.”

Kingsolver was away about 20 years before she returned to her Appalachian Mountains. “I missed the trees, I missed the mossy creeks and the ferny glens and the hollows. I missed water and green, and just longed for home.” The land has a “whole ecosystem of people,” she said in a magazine interview several years ago, “who are survivors, who are caregivers ... It is a resilience embedded in community.”

Putting Appalachia in the heart and soul of “Demon Copperhead,” she created an award-winning tapestry filled with the characters that take up the issues of social justice so engaging in this narrative.

Navy sea stories

Navy personnel, past and present, will enjoy Kim Kipling's new adventure book,

“Neptune's Asylum: Sea Stories from the 1980s U.S. Navy” (Kim Kipling, 245 pgs., \$26.95).

Kipling, a retired surface warfare officer, has put together about 60 tales of navy life in the waning years of the Cold War. Landlubbers beware, this focuses on the water and may, for some people, mean very little in terms of stories and folks in them.

Some of the accounts are very good, some probably should have been omitted because they focus on such a narrow frame of reference. Some language also is naval — we used to say specifically Marine Corps — salty and otherwise.

Kipling notes that “sailors serving today will recognize much that hasn't changed a bit.”

*Wilford Kale of Williamsburg is a former journalist and retired communications professional. Have a comment or suggestion for Kale? Contact him at Kaleonbooks95@gmail.com*



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# Where am I?



In each edition, the Slice staff provides a challenge of sorts, testing how much of Isle of Wight and Surry counties you really know. We photograph some location that is readily accessible and open to the public, and see if you can tell us where it is. If you know where this photo was taken, submit your answer, along with your name and contact information, to [news@smithfieldtimes.com](mailto:news@smithfieldtimes.com). If you're right, you will be entered for a chance to win a \$25 gift card. So, if you know where this is, let us know. If you're right, you could be a winner. Go out and enjoy!

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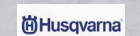
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# The Music Man

Dru Stowe keeps swing music humming in Smithfield

Story by Phyllis Speidell  
Photos by John H. Sheally II

Among the genres of popular music, swing is one of the most enduring. Popularized by the classic big bands of the 1930s and 1940s, swing lives on today with smaller ensembles as well.

The Williamsburg Classic Swing Orchestra, fronted by Smithfield music man Dru Stowe, brings swing to town frequently. Appreciative fans know that the music will wrap them in a nostalgic cloud of well-being – or at least set their feet tapping.

Bandleader Duke Ellington captured the growing popularity of swing music with his 1932 hit “If it Ain’t Got That Swing, It Don’t Mean a Thing.”

So, what is swing music? If the first few bars put you in the mood to dance to “One O’clock Jump” or “The Jersey Bounce” or glide around the floor to “Moonlight Serenade,” you’re likely listening to the infectious strains of swing.

Swing music evolved from jazz during the Depression years of the 1930s and exploded in popularity in the 1940s World War II era. The big dance bands – Glenn Miller, Stan Kenton, the Dorsey Brothers, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Cal Calloway and more – spread the music via concerts, Hollywood musicals and jukeboxes. Those old enough, or lucky enough, to have grown up with swing playing from radios or 78 and 33 rpm records can still recognize their favorite numbers from the first few notes.





Jon Hartley, a local vintage record collector and dealer, commented on swing's legacy: "We grew up listening to big band music as background for Bugs Bunny and other cartoons as well as the Disney animated movies of the 1950s. George Lucas even included a swing influenced piece, deliberately meant to reflect Benny Goodman's 'Sing, Sing, Sing,' in the Star Wars cantina band scene."

Stowe and the Williamsburg Classic Swing Orchestra focus on bringing the magic of swing to younger audiences as well as longtime fans who appreciate the sentimental journeys the music can reflect. As the band advertises, it is "Keeping the music of the swing era alive and kickin'."

Stowe enjoys introducing high school music students to the challenge and fun of swing music. Spanning the generations, he also teaches an ElderHostel music history course titled "Life in the Pits."

Music has been part of Stowe's life since he was 12 and first picked up a trombone. He grew up in Belmont, North Carolina, a



town that is much like Smithfield, he said, "except think cotton, not ham."

He played with the Red Raiders band of Southpoint High School and continued his band experience with the Marching Virginians during his time at Virginia Tech. He credits the music with keeping him sane during his rigorous engineering studies.

In 1983, Stowe left Belmont to pursue a career in aerospace engineering with the Army aviation facility at Fort Eustis, where he focused on Black Hawk helicopters.

When he traveled to Lynchburg for his best friend's wedding, he met his future wife, Karen Stone. She was one of the five young professional violinists, the Stone Sisters, who played at the wedding.

The couple settled in Newport News, where, in 1988, he left engineering to launch Mursto Productions, a booking agency for musical groups and other entertainers. Both Stowes joined the Hotel Paradise Roof Garden Orchestra when it debuted in 1992, playing music from the

1920s and 1930s with Dru on the tuba and Karen as first violin.

When friends who performed regularly at Busch Gardens mentioned a scarcity of musicians, Dru signed on as a part-time musician, starting in the park's Italian section. For 28 years he played in all of the park's different sections and became the music supervisor and special events coordinator.

"I felt like Johnny Carson," Stowe recalls.

One downside to a Busch Gardens musician's job is the monotony of playing the same program five or more times a day.

"It can become automatic – like you are on automatic pilot," he said.

To break the routine – and enrich their skills – the musicians met after hours to read and practice big band charts that were more challenging and written for a larger ensemble. Their practices went so well that they asked permission to hold a big band-style concert for all of the employees. The evening of the concert, an Anheuser-Busch executive visiting from St. Louis saw the exuberant reaction of the audience and invited the group to perform their swing music regularly at the park on Friday and Saturday nights.

For 20 years the big band concerts continued with a heavy dose of swing – until management canceled the program. Undeterred, the musicians formed the Williamsburg Classic Swing Orchestra. While playing brass, Stowe also fronts the orchestra as it continues to keep swing alive, performing across the region.

Stowe also enjoys other genres, playing with Legacy Motown Revues as well as the Tommy Dorsey and Irving Berlin orchestras when they appear locally. You also may have seen him at Harbor Park with the Tomcats playing Dixieland at Norfolk Tides baseball games.

Stowe, active in the Isle of Wight Arts League, serves as executive director of the Sundays at 4 concert series, which includes an annual Terrific Teens Talent concert showcasing local teenage musicians. He also leads the Second Ending Brass Quintet.

The Stowes have two children, and both have inherited their parents' musical talent. Nathan Stowe is a gemologist in San Diego and sings in a United Methodist Church. Their daughter, Virginia, lives in Elizabeth City and plays both the trumpet and the violin. She and her husband have a daughter and another baby on the way.

To this day, Stowe has no regrets about leaving aerospace to pursue music in a myriad of ways. His varied musical experiences sparked an interest in antique musical instruments and led to his collection of more than 200 instruments covering 400 years from pre-Shakespeare to swing.

The Stowes share a future goal of opening a music museum and concert hall on the nine acres they bought when they moved from Newport News to Smithfield. You can be sure that the 8,000-square-foot Tudor Castle they are building will include acoustics designed to handle any music genre and draw music-loving visitors to the Smithfield area.

A true music man, Stowe was delighted to see completion of the new Main Street Square stage. The Williamsburg Classic Swing Orchestra plays there occasionally, and now, Stowe said, "When it's done and we play there, all the musicians will now fit easily on the stage."

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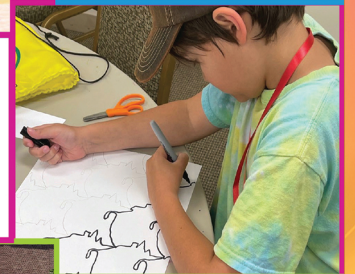


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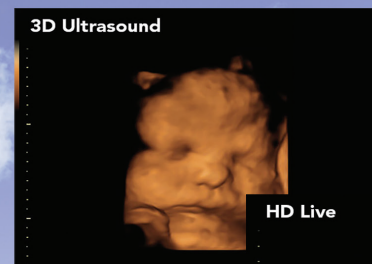


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# A chip off the block

Woodcarver and painter Jim Warren has honed his craft for decades

Story by Stephen Faleski

Jim Warren grew up on a farm watching his grandfather whittle.

“One thing led to another,” said Warren, who for nearly 50 years has immersed himself in the time-honored craft of woodcarving.

Warren, now 73, has lived most of his life on the same Isle of Wight County farm his father purchased shortly after Warren was born. Warren retired from

Dominion Energy’s Surry nuclear power plant about 11 years ago, but says he’s busier than ever. He’s made hundreds of carvings over the years, most by special order.

“They’ll bring me a picture of their house, a picture of this store, sometimes they’ll bring wood from an old house,” Warren said.

Relief carving entails creating a

three-dimensional image in wood. For landscapes, that means cutting out the deepest background areas first, and removing layer by layer to create shadowing with different depths. It’s all done by hand with knives and chisels.

When he first started, he got a lot of cuts. Now he wears a glove when carving.

“You’ve gotta keep your tools sharp, very sharp,” Warren said.



Warren demonstrates the technique of cutting out the background, the first step in relief carving.



It also takes a lot of hand pressure to keep the blade on course, and there's little to no margin for error.

But he's had a lot of practice over the decades. During his 34 years with Dominion, he'd head to his workshop after work and start carving.

"I can sit here and not even think about what I'm doing," Warren said.

His precision carving came to the attention of county officials in the early 1980s when he got commissioned – or, in his words, "conscripted" – into making a carving of Isle of Wight's then-new county seal. Prior to 1984, the county used a circular design featuring a plow and sunburst. County resident Betty Hanlon had designed a new seal that year to commemorate the 1634-founded county's 350th anniversary. Warren was tasked with carving the design, which features a pine tree, ham, peanut and the historic St. Luke's Church and 1750 courthouse atop the shoe-shaped county, into a wooden box that then-Gov. Chuck Robb presented to dignitaries from Isle of Wight, England, for the occasion.

"That kind of punched my ticket," Warren said.

He also paints rocks – often with farming scenes – and frequently works on more than one project at a time. While one is drying, he may go back to an in-progress relief carving or one of his wooden benches.

"I love to carve more than paint, but as you can see, I do both," Warren said.

He's never had art lessons, and prefers the texture of wood and stone to canvas.

"I like wood because it's dimensional, you know, you can make your shadows in it," Warren said. "Painting rocks is about like painting canvas, I guess, except it's harder because it's porous and round."

As of April 5, he was working on a cedar bench made from a tree that came down in a hurricane.

"Any good wood is getting hard to find," Warren said.

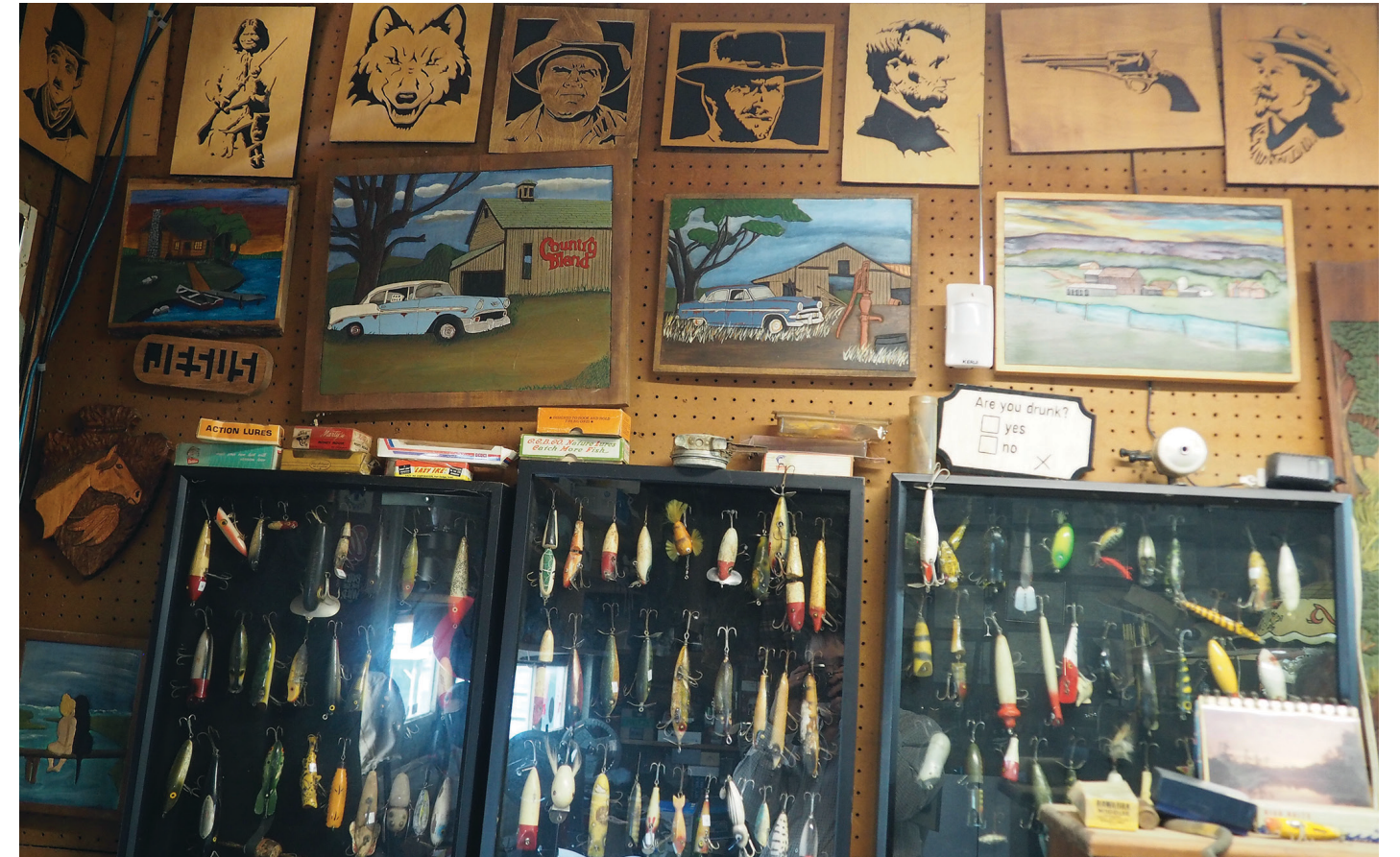
He used to go down to local lumber yards to obtain bass wood, which is ideal for its ease of carving both with the grain and against it, but said the supply chain issues that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic have made it difficult to find.

The rocks he usually obtains from Farmers Service ACE in Smithfield. His process involves placing the rock in a vice and grinding one side so it will stand up.

"Everybody talks like they're something special; I guess they could be," Warren said. "I don't feel special."



Warren holds up one of his painted rocks.



Jim Warren's painted and unpainted wood relief carvings hang in his workshop above his fishing lure collection.

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**Last edition's  
Where  
Am I?**



The Where Am I? challenge in the Spring 2023 edition of Slice featured a dog statue. The Lili, canine ambassador and loyal companion of former Historic St. Luke's curator Richard Austin. The sculpture sits near the parking lot of St. Luke's.

Four people were able to identify the location. Cynthia Keen has won the \$25 gift certificate. Check out page 10 for this edition's challenge.

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