



a Slice of Smithfield

Winter 2024

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EDITORIAL
Stephen Faleski
Writer

Phyllis Speidell
Writer

Jen Jaqua
Photographer

PRODUCTION
Troy Cooper
Designer

ADVERTISING
Lindsay Richardson
Regional Sales Manager

Taylor McMickle
Marketing Consultant

Mitzi Lusk
Marketing Consultant

ADMINISTRATION
Steve Stewart
Publisher

The Smithfield Times
PO Box 366,
Smithfield, VA 23431
www.smithfieldtimes.com
757.357.3288

a Slice of Smithfield

A life well lived

Penning this quarterly column is usually a happy, upbeat exercise, reflective of what Slice of Smithfield seeks to be for a wonderful community.

This December day finds us quite sad, news having arrived of the passing of award-winning photojournalist John H. Sheally II, whose pictures have graced the pages of our magazine for the past three years. Images from his last Slice assignment, a feature on vinyl record collector Jon Hartley, appear on the pages herein.

John, who closed the book on his lengthy career at age 80, was gifted a Brownie camera at 8 years old, inspiring his dream of being a photojournalist and chronicling his community and world. He was still in high school in Hopewell when he first shot photos for the local newspaper.

Tenure as an aerial photographer in the Navy and a stint at the Petersburg newspaper preceded a long career at the Virginian-Pilot. John became a recognizable face throughout Tidewater, including Smithfield, where he loved to visit.

“You can’t find good stories sitting in the newsroom” was John’s motto. The man never sat still. Away from work, John buried himself in his hobbies, including Morgan sports cars.

He was an internationally recognized expert on the British marque, publishing several books about Morgans. He owned and raced a medley of classic Morgans himself for 40 years, traveling to the competitions in his restored black 1939 Chevrolet grain bed truck/turned race car hauler.

But photojournalism was his calling. Even after leaving the Pilot, John continued a busy schedule as a freelancer with writing sidekick Phyllis Speidell. They found time to write for our magazine even while writing and illustrating books about Tidewater people and institutions. John was blessed to be in the small ranks of people who find their vocation early in life and keep doing it until the end.

The day Slice magazine hit the streets four times a year was one of John’s favorites. We’ll miss seeing him coming up the sidewalk and hearing the familiar question, “Is it here yet?”

Rest in peace, my friend.



Award-winning photojournalist
John H. Sheally II

Steve Stewart

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Jon Hartley has more than 6,000 albums in his private collection in addition to the hundreds he sells in his boutique in the Hamtown Mercantile in downtown Smithfield.



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Opera singer Adam Richardson, a 2005 Smithfield High graduate, has come a long way since his elementary school music teacher selected him to sing “Home on the Range” in front of the school. He’s now performing on much bigger stages.

ON THE COVER: Nora Bender got some face time with Santa at the Isle of Wight County Museum’s “Evening with St. Nick” in November.



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Sharing the Music and the Memories

Jon Hartley's vinyl record collection tops 6,000

Story by Phyllis Speidell
Photos by John H. Sheally II

Bob Seger and his Silver Bullet Band may have been ahead of their time 45 years ago when they sang "Take those old records off the shelf – I'll sit and listen to 'em by myself."

Today collectors – and casual music fans – still seek out vintage 78 and 33 rpm records in an array of genres, including old time rock and roll.

Jon Hartley has seen recorded music progress from those old shellac or vinyl discs through audio tapes, CDs, and streaming via computers, MP3 players and cell phones. In an era when almost any music is instantly available, there is something special and nostalgic about those old records and the music that, for many, as Seger sang, "just soothes the soul."

Hartley can attest to the popularity of those old records. He has more than 6,000 albums in his private collection in addition to the hundreds he sells in his boutique in the Hamtown Mercantile in downtown Smithfield. He and his wife, Maggie, also travel to record shows and meets where he circulates, visiting among the other vendors, many of whom have become friends, while Maggie, as she says with a laugh, tends his booth and chats with the customers.

"Jon comes alive at those shows," she said.

"One of the thrills of a record show is finding an album you've spent years searching for," Hartley said, "It's the thrill of the hunt - like finding a first pressing of the 'Dark Side of the Moon'."

That Pink Floyd album, released by Capitol 50 years ago, remains one of the

most sought after among collectors.

"You can also find oddball stuff like the Harpo Marx album, featuring Harpo playing the harp, that I had priced at \$30 for five years and never sold," he said. He thought, reluctantly, of lowering the price, but before he could bring himself to do that, the album sold for \$30 at a show in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The Hartleys seem to come naturally to their respect and appreciation for history of any kind. Their Smithfield home, which they constantly restore and renew, is an 1815 farmhouse with 11 outbuildings.

A pair of magnificent magnolia trees frame the entry to their 10-acre property where they raise fruit and nuts. Drive onto their property and you will likely be greeted by Zeus, their energetic half bird dog/half pit bull, while their shy beagle, Daisy, watches from a distance.

One of their additions to the house included a den/office for Hartley that houses some of his collection.

Record albums, all shelved by genre and neatly alphabetized, fill the walls while the overflow of albums is stored in several of the restored outbuildings including the small hay barn.

Growing up in Albany, New York, Hartley spent two years in Pakistan in the 1970s when his father accepted a job to come and set up a student affairs and counseling office at Lahore University in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Although Hartley was only 7 years old when the family arrived in Pakistan, his time there was memorably impactful.

"You cannot understand the world from

inside the U.S.," he said. "You cannot understand the plight of the people who can be happy even living in lesser conditions and always ready to flee drought, violence or other threats."

The Pakistan experience led him to major in geography and planning at the State University of New York College at Geneseo (SUNY Geneseo.) a decade later.

The Hartleys were a musical family and he played guitar and a little keyboard with a band in high school. When he got to college, he also DJ'd at the university radio station.

Shortly after Jon and Maggie married, they embarked, with a pup tent and \$2,000, on a year-long cross-country tour that ended in Roanoke, where Maggie's father had retired. They arrived just in time for Jon to attend a conference of professional planners in nearby Natural Bridge – and land a job that day.

His career in planning took John from ten years in Roanoke to Isle of Wight in 1997 as director of planning.

"I had always been a country boy – always like rural areas – and always enjoyed architectural history," he said. "I was a history buff and already familiar with St. Luke's church and Bacon's Castle."

Even the name of his vintage record business, Deerfield, has historical connections. In old English, "hart" referred to a male deer and "ley" referred to an arable field.

Hartley also has a long history as a collector – of coins, stamps and even stones.

"Sort of a packrat," he admitted.

In Roanoke, however, he turned his



collecting hobby toward records, soon accumulating 300 albums and still looking. He credits record collecting with giving him a wealth of information that spans a broad gamut. He became enamored with jazz while in college, so much so that he lost track of most rock music. His favorite album, however, remains one by King Crimson, a 1960s British progressive rock band that drew their inspiration from a wide range of musical genres – much the way Hartley's interests run.

As Isle of Wight's planning director, Hartley was involved with International Paper as it worked

through environmental concerns. He worked with developers who were eager to create mixed-use communities, including

the vast Eagle Harbor on 567 acres zoned for up to 1,510 residential units. Then he dealt with the developers of Founders Pointe, zoned for 340 single-family homes. It was a challenge in many directions, including sewer and water connection disputes. Along the way Hartley advised on speed limits, road signage, wetlands construction violations, septic systems and multiple other concerns.

"People worry about overdevelopment of the area," he said. "But growth is incremental, and planning is the closest thing we have to managing growth. We don't focus enough on a diversity of options in planning."

When Hartley resigned from his position of Isle of Wight, he took a similar

job as manager of current planning in Portsmouth, where he stayed until retiring in 2019.

Wherever he worked, music has remained part of his life and he is happy to share his knowledge and joy in collecting.

"I was raised as a Quaker and I still carry a Quaker ethic with me," Hartley said, adding that he's not out to make a fortune dealing in vintage records - he just wants to share the music.

"Music transcends time and stays in your memory," he said. "'Henry VIII, I Am' by Herman's Hermits was popular when I was a teenager having fun in a wood Chris Craft on Lake George and singing 'I'm Henry the Eighth, I am' at the top of my voice. Still brings those memories."

FULL CIRCLE

Opera singer Richardson coming home to Tidewater



Opera singer Adam Richardson, a 2005 graduate of Smithfield High School and the Governor's School for the Arts, will return to his roots in January when he joins the Virginia Opera for the production of "Sanctuary Road" in Norfolk.

The performances are set for Jan. 26 at 7:30 p.m. and Jan. 28 at 2:30 p.m. at Harrison Opera House. Additional shows are slated for February in Richmond and in Fairfax.

"Sanctuary Road," based on the writings of William Grant Still, is an opera that "documents stories of enslaved fugitives escaping to freedom during the early to mid-1800s," Richardson said. "I am the baritone soloist for this production. What's most heartwarming about this show is that while it's a story about enslaved people, the show's ending concludes from a perspective that isn't customarily highlighted when it comes to the story of the enslaved. And that being thanks to the likes of people like William Grant Still, some enslaved people did escape to freedom."

Richardson began singing as a child when his elementary school music teacher selected him to sing "Home on the Range" in front of the school. He honed his skills by singing in the church choir.

"My grandparents, aunts, uncles,

cousins, we all sang in church, so funnily enough, I thought everyone could sing," he said. "What I enjoyed then and still enjoy now is the community I've found in singing. Having a shared passion for something and creating it with other like-minded individuals is one of the best parts of this career."

After graduating from high school, he went on to study classical voice music at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, where he earned a degree in music. He later received his master's degree at The Juilliard School in New York City, where he currently resides.

Richardson's repertoire includes roles in "We Shall Not Be Moved," "Factotum," "X: The Life Times of Malcolm X" and Hanjo, among others. He's traveled across the country as well as to Amsterdam and Italy for performances.

"Each of these experiences has been rewarding in their own way," he said. "I've gotten to work with incredible artists at the top of the field, and with friends, some of whom I've known for over 20 years. Outside of opera, I also perform in Broadway musicals as well. I last performed in the Tidewater area in early 2020 on the national tour of Cats."

"Sanctuary Road" will be his first time performing with the Virginia Opera.

"I was excited when I was asked to join this production, as it'll be my debut with this company, but mainly, I can have my family and friends at home see me perform," he said. "Virginia Opera was also the first professional company I worked for as a teenager. During my days at the Governor's School, there was an apprentice program where older students could sing in the chorus of a few other productions. I had the privilege of being in two operas, so this feels like a full-circle moment."

He is looking forward to taking the stage in his own backyard.

"I've had the privilege to travel all over the country and to different countries, and, while those experiences are amazing, it's rare that I know many or anyone in the audience," he said. "So, getting to perform for a home crowd is really special. I hope people come and can enjoy themselves. I would love it if parents bring their children. I was fortunate to have the arts in life, in various forms, from a young age, and I know the importance of arts education, so if this show can be even a tiny part of that for a young person, I hope they can experience it."

For ticket information to the performances of "Sanctuary Road" in Norfolk, visit www.virginiasymphony.org/sanctuaryroadnorfolk.

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. 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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Last edition's Where Am I?

The Where Am I? challenge in the Fall 2023 edition of Slice took readers on a journey into Smithfield's Windsor Castle Park — specifically its South Mason Street entrance. Lynn Cole was among six readers to correctly identify the location and wins a \$25 gift certificate from the Christmas Store.



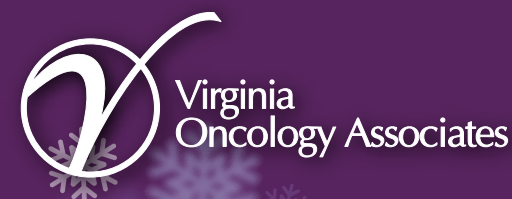
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