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Vol. 2 2025

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of Jack Tant
recalled

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history revealed

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lead effort to
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Memories of Jack Tant recalled



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Jack Tant poses for a photo with his family following the Littleton Historical Society presentation on Tant and his contribution to NASCAR race engine building.

Littleton race car engine builder worked with NASCAR legends Hendrick, Petty, and Earnhardt

By MARK MATHEWS

Littleton's Jack Tant is one of NASCAR's winningest engine builders in the sport's history. The legendary car engine builder is also credited with building the first four-barrel carburetor. Earlier this year, Gordon Gray delivered a presentation about Tant for the Littleton Historical Society at the Littleton Town Hall. Tant, 96, attended the gathering as Gray recalled Tant's historical significance and his personal memories of the engine-building icon.

"The first time I met Jack was in 1952 or 53," Gray said. "I was about 12 years old. Jack and Raymond Jenkins operated an auto shop where Robinson Funeral Home is now. I went one Saturday morning and they were preparing this 1940 Ford to race at Wilson County Speedway the next day. The exhaust pipes were designed to come about half way up the backside of the race car and when they cranked it up I thought it was the loudest thing I had ever heard."

Gray went to the races in Wilson the next day. Joe Weatherly drove the car in the feature event and finished third. Right then, Gray became hooked on auto racing, a passion that continues to this day 72 years later.

In 1956, Tant and Jenkins built the engine for their third race car, a 1937 Chevrolet with a modified over-



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head valve V-8 engine. Tant designed his 4-barrel carburetor for the vehicle and convinced Eddie Crouse of Glenn Allen, Virginia, to drive the No. 11 car.

Crouse dominated at the Brunswick Speedway, operating the No. 11 car for four seasons—with one exception. Approximately once a month, John Tadlock of Norfolk brought his No. 2 car, a 1937 Plymouth sporting a DeSota Firedome engine.

“Every time Tadlock brought that Deuce to Brunswick Speedway, it would always outrun Jack’s No. 11, which Eddie Crouse was driving, and put on a hell of a show while doing it,” Gray said. “Guess who was driving the Tadlock Deuce, none other than Ray Hendrick.”

Gray was a fan of Crouse. However, he was blown away by Hendrick’s driving skills. On Saturdays, he would often encourage Tant to contact Hendrick and encourage the phenom to drive the No. 11 Tant car.

Finally, in 1960, Tant tried to persuade Hendrick to drive his No. 11 car. Hendrick said he would have to fulfill his obligation for the season with another car owner before making the change.

“Ray Hendrick started driving what is now known as The Flying No. 11,” Gray said. “To this day Jack Tant gives me credit for convincing him to go talk to Ray Hendrick.”

Hendrick won more than 700 races in his 36-year career as a race car driver, including 20 wins at Martinsville Speedway between 1963 and 1975. He also won five track championships at South Boston Speedway. Four of his titles came in the NASCAR Modified class,



Contributed

A 14 -year-old Gordon Gray sits in the drivers’ seat of the No. 11 car.

and the other in the NASCAR Late Model Sportsman division. Hendrick competed in 17 Winston Cup races, finishing in the top 10 six times.

Rick Hendrick, famed owner of Hendrick Motor Sports, was one of Ray’s pit crew members. The two are not related.

Tant came to Littleton from Suffolk, Virginia, in 1945 after his mother died. He moved in with his mother’s sister, Myrtle Hobbs, and his uncle, Garland Hobbs. Tant attended Littleton High School.

“That’s where he met his sweetheart Virginia Shea-



Contributed

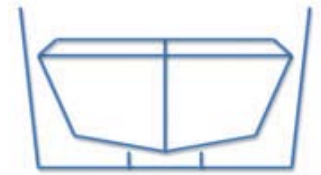
Littleton’s Jack Tant built the engines for the Flying No. 11 which dominated on the race track.

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Gordon Gray, far right, stands by the legendary Jack Tant during Gray's Littleton Historical Society feature on the race car engine building legend.

rin," Gray said. "Jack says he knew Virginia was the one he was going to marry the first time he saw her. Jack graduated in 1947 and they married in 1948."

Jack and Raymond Jenkins opened an auto shop shortly after Jack graduated from high school. Jack found his calling and was ready to start a family. Jack and Virginia went on to raise five children: Jean, Cheryl, Susan, Beth, and Jack, Jr.

Jack and Jenkins remained in business together for 14 years before Jack bought out Jenkins' share of the shop in 1962.

South Boston Speedway was converted from a dirt track to asphalt. Bernie Moore and Jack brought the No. 11 car to the track in South Boston and other racing venues.

"They entered the big races in the fall at Martinsville and Trenton International Speedway in New Jersey, and I might add, winning 80% of the races they entered," Gray said.

Jack partnered with Clayton Mitchell of Norlina in 1966 for the racing part of the business. Mitchell had sported a race car driven by James Hayes. The Tant-Mitchell partnership turned into dominance on the race

track.

"Clayton Mitchell was an expert and way ahead of his time on how to work on a race car chassis and make it handle on a race track," Gray said. "Jack Tant was way ahead of his time on building small block 350 racing engines, and in my opinion that had the best race car driver I had ever seen."

Jack eased out of the race car business in 1971 and put his focus on building engines for NASCAR drivers, including Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt.

"I could stay up here all night and tell you folks about the legendary Jack Tant, but it's hard to tell you how it really all happened," Gray said. "You actually had to live it to really appreciate the 50s, 60s time of modified stock car racing."

Many of Jack's family members joined him at the Littleton Historical Society gathering in his honor. He posed for pictures with audience members and spoke with them following Gray's presentation.

Jack still resides in Littleton, and his vital role in building engines in a sport that started as a regional competition and developed into a national brand won't be forgotten anytime soon.

Briggs settles in as LKG Regional Chamber of Commerce



Amanda Briggs started her tenure as the Lake Gaston Regional Chamber of Commerce president and chief executive officer on Monday, March 17. It's been a great start for Briggs.

"Everyone has been very welcoming, and I encourage everyone to stop in and see me at the office and feel free to email, call, or text," Briggs said. "Of course, I will also be getting out and about and look forward to putting faces with names. I'm very excited and can't wait to dive in."

Briggs comes to the Chamber from Meherrin River Forest Products in Weldon, where she worked in Human Resources management and recruitment. She was also an instrumental member of the Roanoke Valley Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

Briggs replaces Leanne Patrick, who served as the Chamber president for six years before pursuing another career opportunity.

"I am really looking forward to working for the Communities surrounding Lake Gaston as the President/CEO of the Chamber of Commerce," Briggs said. "The Chamber already has such a great foundation and I feel we can only go up from there."

The new head of the Chamber is looking forward to connecting with Lake Gaston citizens and business owners. She is already working to promote Lake Gaston and its resources to outside entities to attract business and tourism revenue to the region.

Chamber Office Manager Mary Lou Kellogg has been an integral part of the organization as a volunteer, board member, and in her current position. She believes Briggs is a perfect hire as the Chamber leader.

"She is really outgoing and will be well received," Kellogg said. "I think she is a great fit."

Briggs is originally from Albany, Oregon, home to the world's largest timber carnival. She relocated to North Carolina 13 years ago.

Briggs has four grown children and four grandchildren, ranging in age from 7 months to 13. In her spare time, Briggs enjoys entertaining friends and family and being out and about.

"We are water people so anywhere that has any kind of water we are there," Briggs said. "We love the different beaches here in North Carolina and of course the wonderful lakes, Lake Gaston being our favorite. I love to sing, laugh, bake, garden, read and enjoy those around me. I believe you need to take each day as it comes and put one foot in front of the other even if sometimes you are walking backward."

Briggs is currently moving forward by serving as the new president and chief executive officer of the Lake Gaston Regional Chamber of Commerce.



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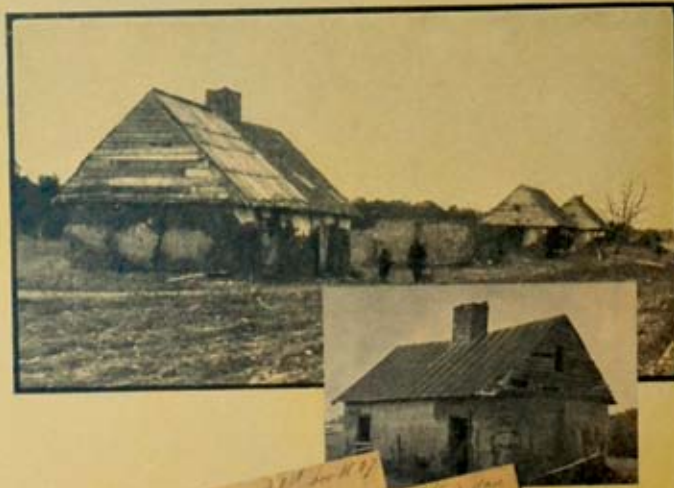
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large. He is improving in the market
of cotton & sugar. I am sure it will be
the same as the one at the plantation.*

Pea Hill Plantation history revealed

By MARK MATHEWS

For two and a half centuries, a tract of land in Valentines, Virginia, passed from heir to heir before an outside entity purchased what remained of the property. The Vintage Gals Lake Gaston Ladies Club group persuaded historian Fred Taylor to deliver a presentation on the history of the Pea Hill Plantation in Valentines, Virginia, and the surrounding community during an LGLC gathering at the Kennon House Restaurant.

The exact date William Browne received a land grant from the king of England, deeding him the property that would eventually become the Pea Hill Plantation, is unknown. What is certain is that Browne received the grant before Brunswick County was created from the western part of Surry County in 1720.

Through the Browne family, Taylor tracks the history of the Pea Hill Plantation and the mud house

that still stands today. The last male descendant of the Browne family came into play in the late 1700s. Lt. Col. William Browne owned Pea Hill Plantation and other holdings throughout Virginia. His primary residence was at the Four Mile Plantation, approximately four miles from the original Jamestown.

"When he passes away in the 1790s, this property and many holdings of thousands of acres, probably tens of thousands of acres in Surry, Sussex, Brunswick, Lunenburg, and Mecklenburg all pass down to his daughter," Taylor said.

The properties were now owned by Sarah Sally Edward Browne. She was 5. A guardianship was in place to oversee the holdings and the business side of the properties for the young girl. In 1813, she married John Tucker Bowdoin.

In 1814, the Bowdoins had a daughter, Sarah Elizabeth Courtney Bowdoin, who is known as Courtney. At age 7, when her last surviving parent died, she became the heir of the family holdings and became



MARK MATHEWS

Fred Taylor delivers a PowerPoint presentation on the Pea Hill Plantation.

the ward of family friend John Hartwell Cocke.

Courtney lived with the Cocke family at the Four Mile Plantation and fell in love with George Cocke. They married in June 1834. George was a West Point graduate and served in the U.S. Army until his resignation the year he and Courtney exchanged wedding vows. They never lived at the Pea Hill Plantation.

A manager oversaw the Pea Hill Plantation business. Taylor said the Pea Hill Plantation was known as a working farm, and the people involved in the day-to-day business at the site were part of a working community.

“Everything that you could possibly need, you are going to find in that local community or close by,” Taylor said. “They are very much not only self sufficient, but at that level they are going to be producing goods for market to send it up to Petersburg or Richmond, or east to Tidewater.”

The 1825 Pea Hill Plantation documented crop yields, including 404 barrels of corn, 17 blade stacks, one top stack bale of cotton, and more than 1,300 pounds of pork. Livestock included 440 hogs, 59 sheep, and 31 heads of cattle.

In the mid-1820s, before railroads came into play, all goods from the Pea Hill Plantation to the market were transported by wagon or water.



Slavery is also a part of Pea Hill Plantation's history. In 1860, one year before the Civil War began, 43 slaves were documented at the site. There was a 70-year-old foreman, 15 fieldhands, and others filling positions as weavers, cooks, spinners, and others. Fifteen were 10 or younger.

The Pea Hill Plantation was also known for the mud houses, including the one standing today on the west side of the Kennon House Restaurant. This was the main house of the plantation, and it contained two chimneys on either side of the building. The other mud



MARK MATHEWS/Lake Gaston Gazette-Observer

Kennon House Restaurant Museum displays lead visitors through some of the history of the historic site in Valentines.

houses were lined up like a street block with a chimney in the middle of the building. The enslaved people lived in the smaller homes.

Many believe the original house, which is still standing, was built in 1792. However, Taylor's research concludes it was built decades later. A Phillip Cocke interview in a July 1836 publication of the *Farmers' Register* puts the timeline of its completion around 1828-29.

George and Courtney Cocke's daughter, Louisiana, married Richard Byrd Kennon of Richmond in 1860. Kennon registered for service when Virginia seceded from the United States and served as a captain and assistant adjutant general on General J.E.B. Stewart's staff.

After the war, Kennon discovered that the tobacco factory in Richmond he owned with his brother had been destroyed by fire, and he moved to Powhatan. In 1877, he and his wife moved to Brunswick County, and Louisiana's mother deeded the Pea Hill land to them.

The Kennon family and descendants remained at Pea Hill until the final descendant, Loulie, died in 1965.

The Kennon family in Colorado inherited the land and sold it to the Colony Club. Katherine Clary Wright purchased the property in 1974 and oversaw the east side expansion to the old mud house. In 1976, the Kennon House Restaurant was born.

It's obvious where Pea Hill Creek on Lake Gaston got its name. The origin of the Pea Hill Plantation name is murkier. Taylor said Clara Kennon Vernon may have delivered the best explanation in the 1960s.

"Pea Hill got its name, legend says, from the wild flower community called the pea pod flower, which used to grow near the creek on the property," Taylor said. "That's as good an explanation as I've come across."

The Kennon House Restaurant is one of the favorite dining establishments in the Lake Gaston region. However, long before the restaurant was established, the site's daily happenings were critical in the area. Its historic significance continues to grip the imagination of history buffs in the Lake Gaston region.

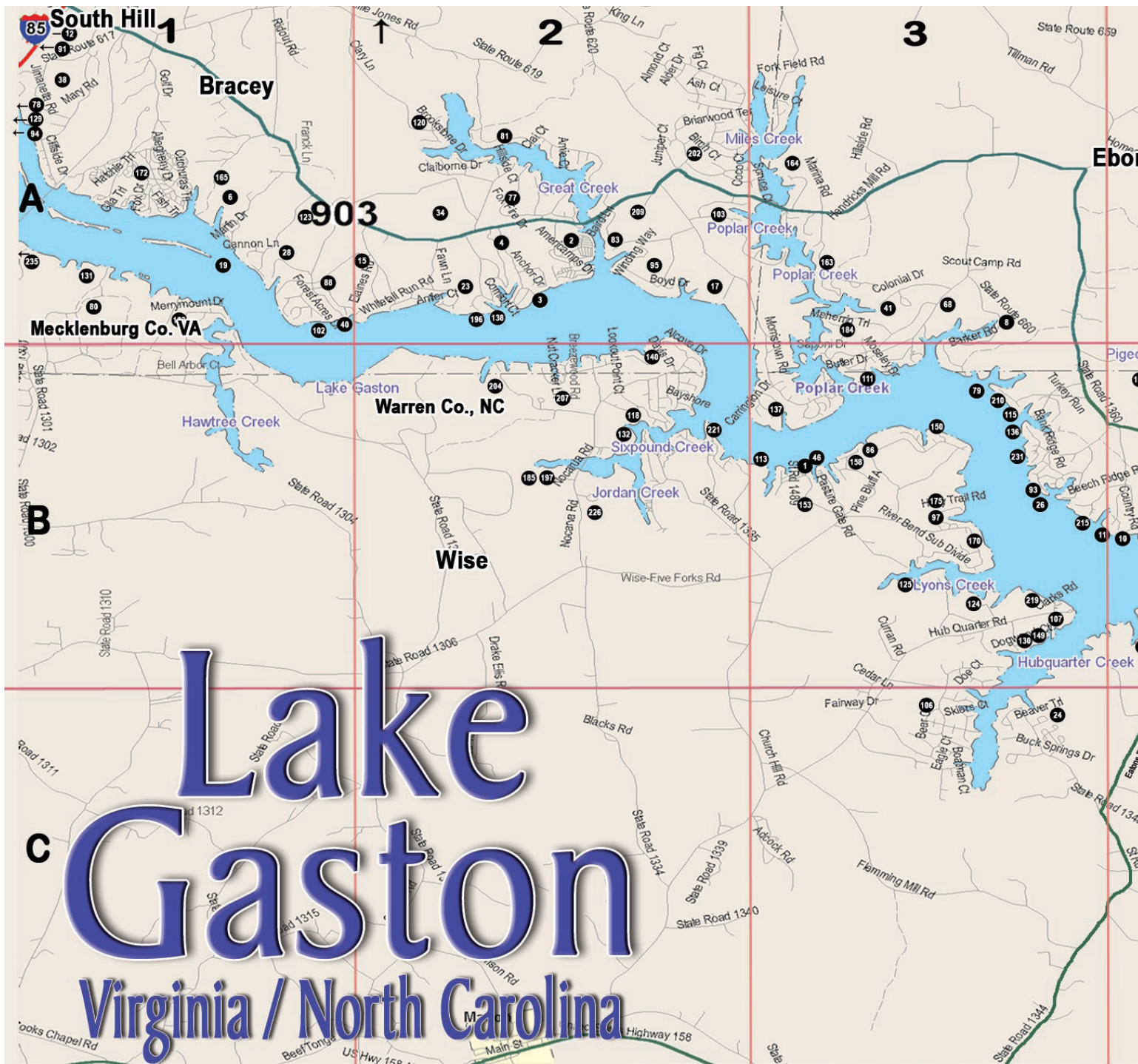


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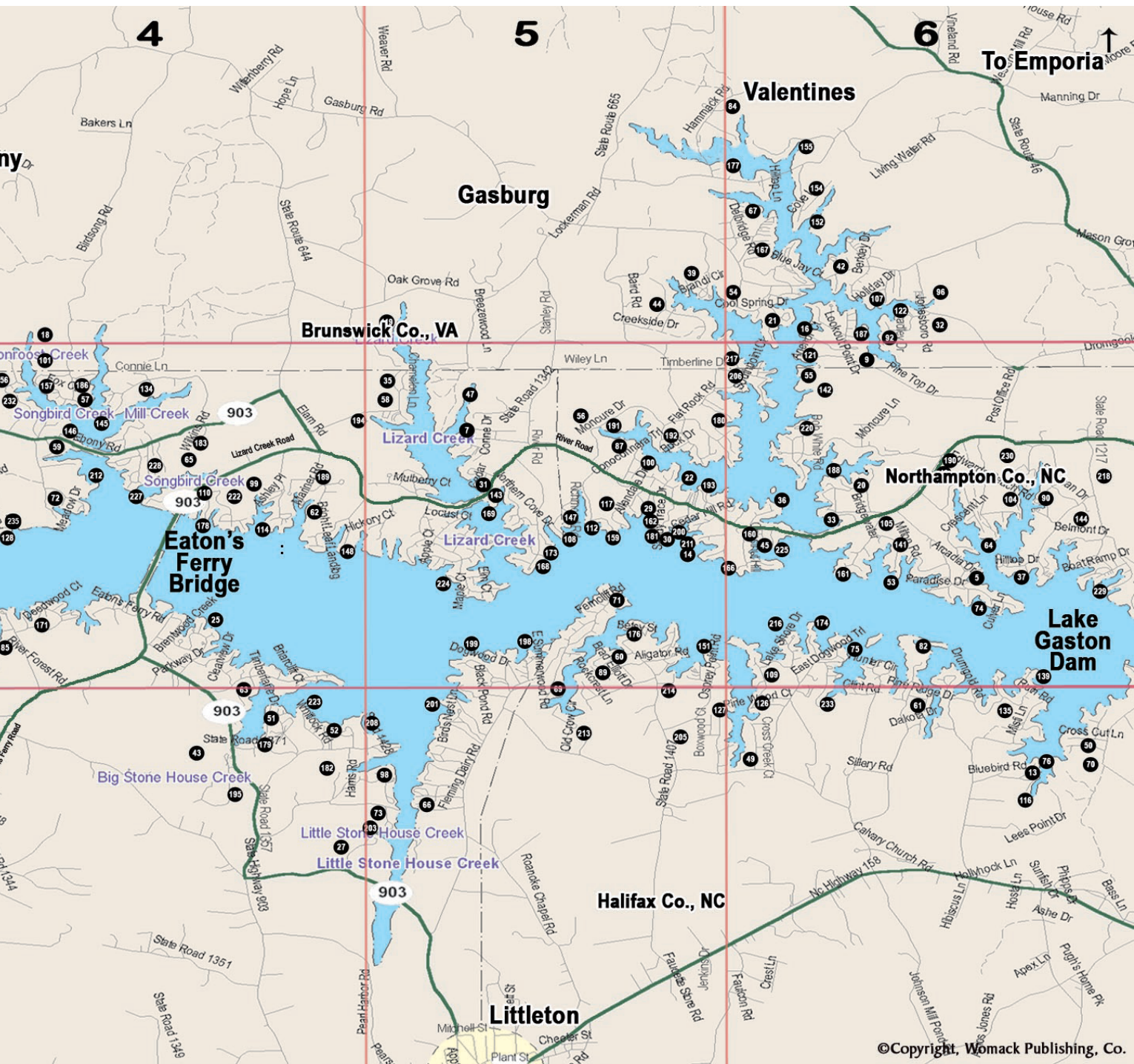
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Lindholm completes 4th career change

From archeologist, lawyer, author to running Littleton's Viridia Bed and Breakfast

By MARK MATHEWS



MARK MATHEWS

Linda Lindholm's "Lafcadio's Legacy" won the 2025 International Book Award.

Viridia Bed and Breakfast owner Linda Lindholm wondered if the number 011 on the permit she received in the fall to open the business meant there were 10 other Bed and Breakfasts in Halifax County. She was surprised to discover Viridia is only the 11th Bed and Breakfast registered in Halifax County's history.

Viridia Bed and Breakfast, 402 Mosby Ave., Littleton, is a beautiful Victorian home just a stone's throw from the Acorn Center. It's a perfect spot for Acorn Center-booked entertainers and visitors to stay while visiting Littleton. The two-story home features unique decor and elegant bedding and bath amenities.

A year ago, Viridia Bed and Breakfast wasn't even on Lindholm's radar. Last summer, her daughter Kathleen suggested turning the home into a bed and breakfast.

"She said it would make a really nice bed and breakfast and there was nothing like it," Lindholm said. "I said why not? We pooled our petty cash and did most of the work ourselves except for the electricity and some plumbing needs."

In August, Lindholm and her daughter went to work painting and decorating the structure. Lindholm went through the steps to get the necessary permits and inspections and successfully completed a food handlers course. Viridia Bed and Breakfast officially opened in October.

Lindholm said running a bed and breakfast is her fourth career. She's been an archeologist, an attorney, and an award-winning author. She is also well-traveled, a trait she may have inherited from her ancestors, who

blazed a trail into the Oregon Territory in the 1840s before Oregon became a state.

After graduating from California State Northridge, Lindholm became an archeologist and worked among the Maya and at sites of the Mayan Ruins in Mexico. She also spent time at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. The work was rewarding for Lindholm. However, with two children to raise, she needed to increase her income and decided to enroll at the Willamette University School of Law in Salem, Oregon.

The private liberal arts school's law program is extremely competitive. It didn't matter if the students passed their courses. Approximately the bottom 10% of students from the course were

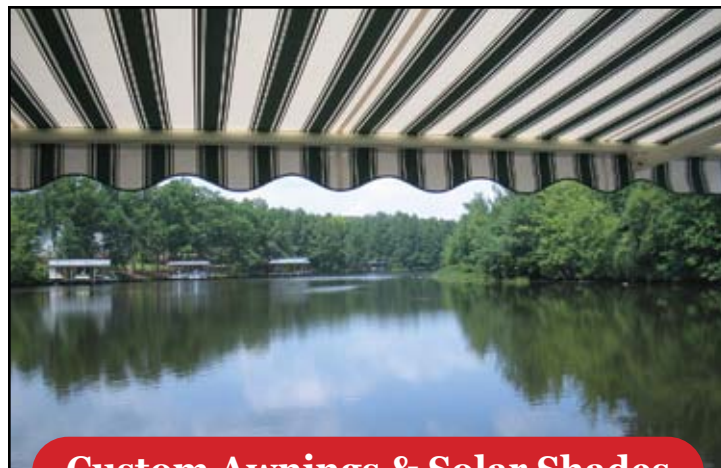


dropped every year. Lindholm went by the motto of five hours of sleep she passes; six hours of sleep she fails. She made it through law school.

"I still had to come home and cook dinner, do scouts, laundry and homework with the kids and all that and get them to bed before I could study," Lindholm said. "There was a train that went through Salem at 1 a.m. that would blow its whistle at different intersections. That was my signal to go to sleep, then begin at 6 a.m. to get everybody ready."

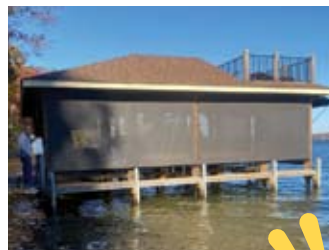
Lindholm had the opportunity to travel abroad during law school. She spent a year at the East China Institute of Politics and Law in Shanghai, China.

After graduating from law school, Lindholm stayed in Salem, the capital of Oregon, and did much legislative work. She was part of committees focused on



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property, landlord-tenant, and fair housing issues. Lindholm also worked with non-profits. Her work in Salem allowed her to play an instrumental role in changing laws.

After leaving law, Lindholm became an author and wrote award-winning books, such as "Widow's Key" and 2025 International Book Award Winner "Lafcadio's Legacy." The latter is a historical look into Lafcadio Hearn, who left the United States for Japan in the late 19th century and never returned. Hearn wrote about Japanese culture, and his writings are still popular today in Japan.

Lindholm hasn't put the pen away. She is working on her next book. However, she is also running the Viridia Bed and Breakfast. The site is a place for people to stay when traveling. It is also a space perfectly suited for its High Tea events, weddings, receptions, and gatherings. Lindholm wants the



MARK MATHEWS

Viridia Bed and Breakfast is a space for weddings, receptions, and group gatherings as well as a place for overnight stays.



MARK MATHEWS

Viridia Bed and Breakfast dining area.



Viridia Bed and Breakfast to be a meeting place for the community.

Lindholm has lived and traveled abroad and now finds herself living in Littleton. She loves it.

"Littleton has been so welcoming," Lindholm said. "The thrift store, the book store, Habitat for Humanity, I'm on a first-name basis with so many people. Liz Johnson will drop something off at my back door and tell me she thought it would look great here. The community has been really delightful. There are some remarkable people here. Their backgrounds, their interests are just phenomenal. I'm very impressed with the quality and variety of the people I'm meeting."

Lindholm brings high-end quality and service to Littleton with the Viridia Bed and Breakfast. Learn more about the business at www.theviridia.com or call 984-344-7774.





Vintage Gals lead effort to preserve St. Luke's

By MARK MATHEWS

For five years, the pews of St. Luke's Church sat empty after the COVID-19 pandemic swept through the country. That's all in the past now and the future of St. Luke's is looking good.

In February, Ann Boyd Smith of the Vintage Gals' group of the Lake Gaston Ladies Club convinced members to preserve the old church off of Hwy. 46 near the Sun Energy Solar site in Henrico. The

entire Lake Gaston community joined the effort in the blink of an eye.

On March 8, approximately 75 people came to the church after LGLC member Jewell Moore pushed a meeting at the church via social media to schedule a site cleanup. She was stunned by the overwhelming response of the community's willingness to roll up their sleeves and assist in the project on the March 13 and March 14 clean-

St. Luke's Church off Highway 46 near River Road in Henrico has a history dating back to the 19th century.



up days.

Moore said one eventual volunteer was driving by the church and noticed there were many cars at the site. He stopped to see what was happening at St. Luke's.

"It was Tony Sykes, of All Above Tree Service," Moore said. "He said to me, I've been riding up and down this road for years, and every time I come by I keep looking at that tree and I keep thinking one day that dead tree is going to fall on that church. He offered to cut the tree down and leave the firewood. Who does that?"

Bobby Talton spread gravel in the parking lot,

Gary Orr cleaned the stained glass windows, Johnny Norton checked the electricity inside the building, and many other volunteers assisted in the St. Luke's renovation effort.

St. Luke's was a popular Christmas Eve service destination for Lake Gaston residents through 2019. The structure that stands today was completed in 1889. However, the history of the St. Luke's church began in Old Gaston, an extinct municipality that today rests at the bottom of Roanoke Rapids Lake.

Lawyer and plantation owner Edmund Wilkins purchased a small building used as a silkworm



MARK MATHEWS

Ann Boyd Smith of the LGLC Vintage Gals gets ready to clean the inside of St. Luke's Church.

cocoonery to establish a mission in Gaston. The first service at the church was performed on July 7, 1859.

Gaston was a critical railroad junction with a rail bridge above the Roanoke River. The Civil War erupted in 1861, and Gaston suffered from the conflict's impact.

"During the war there were Confederate soldiers stationed in Weldon," Smith said. "A Confederate officer ordered the bridge to be burned so the Union soldiers could not cross the river. They burned the bridge and that was the downfall of Gaston because they couldn't get any commerce."

The new Gaston resides today in a community that was once known as Camp Store. The new Gaston Township was formed under its current name in 1949.





The Henrico church hasn't always been called St. Luke's. Smith said the name St. Luke's Chapel appeared in 1874. Many ministers have preached from the pulpit in St. Luke's through the years.

In 2007, Betsy Moncure submitted the Episcopal designation request for Historic Church of the Episcopal Diocese to Rev. Canon E.t Malone, chair of the Historic Properties Commission. The request was approved, marking St. Luke's, Northampton County, as a historic church.

Smith said the Christmas Eve services will return, and she wants to see the St. Luke's site become a venue for other church services, weddings, and gatherings.

St. Luke's future appears bright, with the LGLC Vintage Gals and Lake Gaston community rallying to preserve the historic site for future generations to enjoy.

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Warming temperatures have **BUNCO NIGHT** heating up at Lakeside Lutheran

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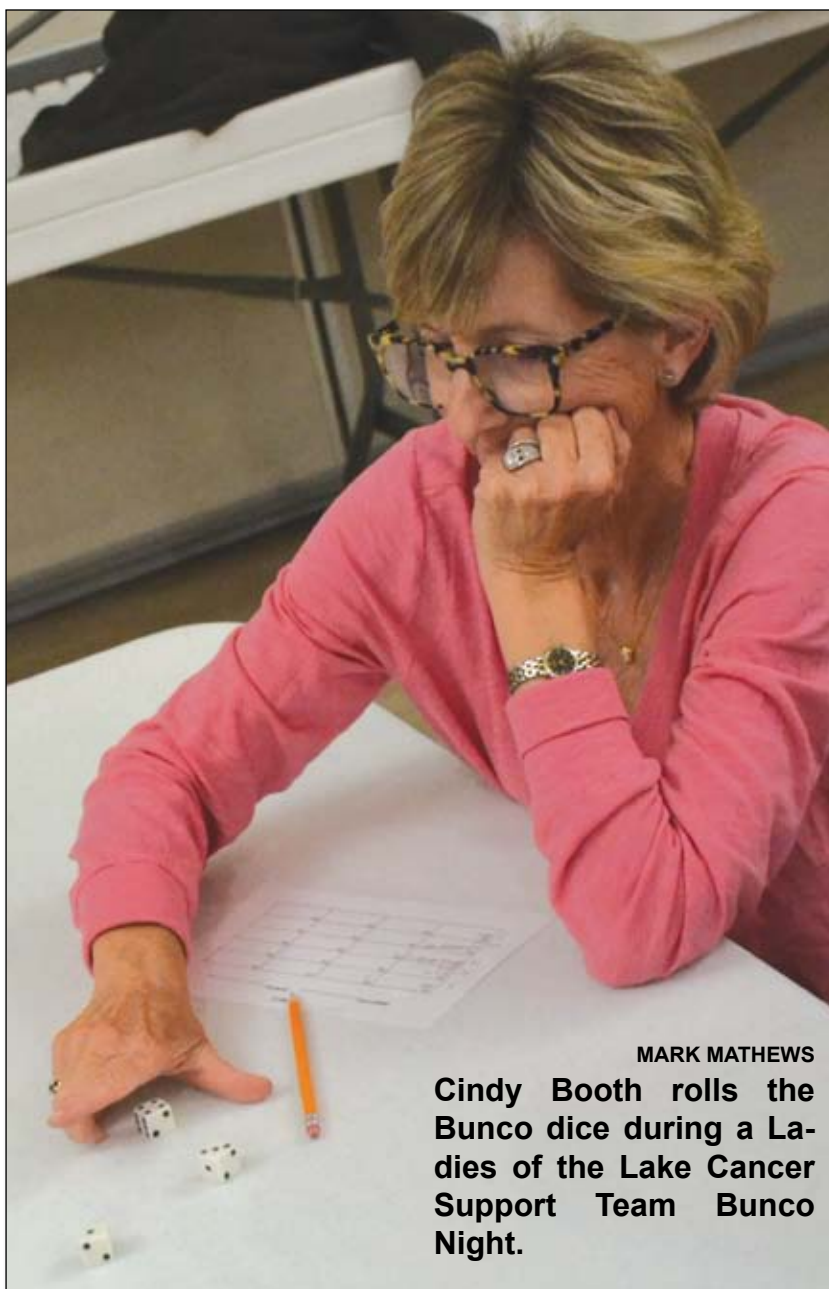
By MARK MATHEWS

The first Tuesday in February marked the beginning of 10 consecutive months of Ladies of the Lake Cancer Support Team Bunco Night fundraisers every first Tuesday of the month at Littleton's Lakeside Lutheran Church. By the time the April Bunco Night arrived, the number of participants slinging dice on the table significantly increased over the first two months. LOL team member Sarah Baltz has recognized the trend year after year.

"In April the weather starts getting better and people return to Lake Gaston from Florida, so we're having a pretty good Bunco tonight," Baltz said. "This is more typical. I think everybody has a good time and as we all know it goes to a good cause."

As the temperatures rise throughout the summer expect the number of participants continue to increase.

The LOL Cancer Support Team is a 501c3 organization offering direct financial support to cancer patients undergoing treatment in the five Lake Gaston counties. The group also donates money to ECU Health North in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, and VCU at the Hendricks

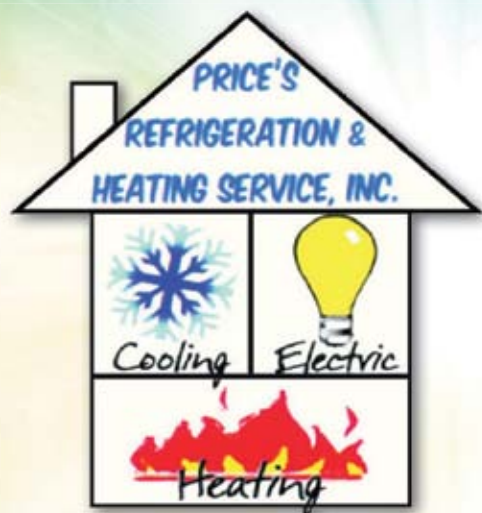


MARK MATHEWS

Cindy Booth rolls the Bunco dice during a Ladies of the Lake Cancer Support Team Bunco Night.

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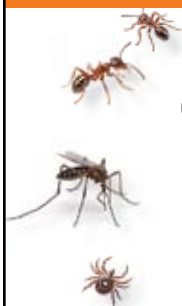
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MARK MATHEWS

The players are all smiles during a LOL Cancer Support Team Bunco Night.



Center in South Hill, Virginia, to assist cancer patients in various ways.

Twenty-four players participated in the April Bunco Night, sitting four deep at six tables, seeking to win the most Bunco's, earn prizes, and avoid the devastating snake eyes dice roll that wipes away all points earned in a round. Bunco Night is also an occasion to enjoy fellowship and fun with other players.

Whether by design or not, Bunco Night has proven to be a successful recruiting tool for attracting new members to the LOL team. Bunco regular Cindy Booth joined the LOL squad in the spring.

"I love what they do and I wanted to be a part of

something good to help cancer patients in our community," Booth said.

Shortly after 7 p.m. on Bunco night, the sounds of dice clatter on tables filling the room. Soon everyone hears the first voice shouting "Bunco" from the first player tossing the Bunco roll. They earn the right to house the large fuzzy die at their side until another player perfects a Bunco toss; hence, the die moved to such player.

Intermission temporarily interrupts the game after several rounds of play, and the players check their tickets as a LOL member calls out numbers for door prizes. The prizes donated by area businesses are distributed as winning ticket numbers get called, and the players head to the snack table for meatballs, strawberries, cookies, and other light snacks.

Once snack time ends, the players return to their prospective tables to play a few more rounds of the fast-moving dice game. The winning player at each table remains when the round ends, and the other three players find spots at other tables. The player movement promotes engaging with different people throughout the evening.

Once the final roll of the dice ends the Bunco games for the night, the LOL Team members distribute more prizes for impressive accomplishments, such as the most Bunco rolls of the evening or the disheartening award of the most snake eyes.

All of the proceeds raised on Bunco Night go directly to supporting cancer patients in Lake Gaston's five counties. Bunco Night begins at 7 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at Lakeside Lutheran Church, 2427 Eaton Ferry Road, Littleton.



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