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# FOUR OAKS Journal

## *A Christmas tribute*

- Eagle Scout honor
- The Grass Cats top the charts
- Community Calendar

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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

# I'm not normal, but I'm no Scrooge, either

I never claimed to be normal.

So, perhaps you won't be surprised to hear that my favorite Christmas movie is not "The Polar Express" or "The Santa Clause."

Both are fine films that I've watched many times with my family, but no, I'm going to go with "Scrooged."

You know, the one where Bill Murray is a TV executive who, in true "A Christmas Carol" style, gets visited by three ghosts, sees the error of his ways and decides to become a better person.

I've watched it dozens of times, and I still laugh hysterically when Carol Kane smacks Murray in the head with a toaster.

Again, read the first sentence.

But I think the reason I like it so much is that, at the end of the year when I'm worn down by all of the things that life has thrown at me — and this year there were a lot — I can watch it and realize that it's never too late to try to be a better person.

*It's Christmas Eve! It's... it's the one night of the year when we all act a little nicer, we... we... we smile a little easier, we... w-w-we... we... we cheer a little more. For a couple of hours out of the whole year, we are the people that we always hoped we would be!*

It's a comedy that's, geez, 27 years old, but it still inspires me to try to smile a little more. Take it from my friend, Bill:

*You won't be one of these (people) who says 'Christmas is once a year and it's a fraud', it's NOT! It can happen every day, you've just got to want that feeling. And if you like it and you want it, you'll get greedy for it! You'll want it every day of your life and it can happen to you. I believe in it now! I believe it's going to happen to me now! I'm ready for it! And it's great! It's a good feeling, it's really better than I've felt in a long time. ... Have a Merry Christmas, everybody.*

Happy Holidays from all of us at the Four Oaks Journal!



Randy Capps  
randy@fouroaksjournal.com

## FEATURES



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**PAGE 4**  
**EAGLE SCOUT HONOR**

**PAGE 12**  
**BUSINESS PROFILE**

**PAGE 6**  
**FOUR OAKS HALLOWEEN**

**PAGE 14**  
**COMMUNITY CALENDAR**

**PAGE 7**  
**CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL**

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## ON THE COVER

A Christmas tree in the home of Karen Barbour Gardner decorated in memory of her late husband, Ted Barbour Jr.

Photo by Randy Capps





# South Johnston graduate earns Eagle Scout honor

Two steps inside the front door to Linda and Michael Pope Sr.'s home is a table situated against the wall.

"It's a shrine to scouting," Linda says with a smile to a visitor, and it is exactly that.

It's hard to make out the shape of the table, or even know how big it is, because of the sheer volume of mementos on, under and around it.

It is dedicated to the scouting career of her grandson, Michael Denver Pope, 18, who recently earned the rank of Eagle Scout. Pope is the third member of his family to receive the honor, following the same path chosen by his grandfather and uncle, Michael Pope Jr.

"It was nice to see that I came from two other generations that had done the same thing," the younger Pope said of sharing a stage with his grandfather and uncle at a ceremony in October. "It was nice to know that I wasn't the only one to go through it all."

It wasn't just family tradition that led him to pursue scouting's highest honor.

"It gives you a sense of what you can do," he said. "If you're stuck outside somewhere, you can get out of it. And you learn a bunch of other stuff you can apply to life, too. ... It helps with job interviews. People like to see that you had the initiative to finish something and that you took the time to do something."

Pope's Eagle Scout project involved painting the fencing and carparks — in addition to



Ginger Pope, Denver Pope, Linda Pope and Michael Pope Sr.

doing a bit of landscaping around the Troop 39 building in Dunn.

The project was near of the end of a long journey with scouting for Pope, which began in third grade.

"I got into it at school," he said. "They had one of those roundup-type things, and then I went home and asked mom (Ginger Pope) if I could do it. We went back that night and signed up."

It took almost a decade, but he worked his way through the Cub Scouts, then the Boy Scouts on his way to becoming an Eagle Scout.

His grandmother's table tells the story.

Every scarf he ever wore is folded neatly inside a Tupperware container, every patch he earned in a ziplock bag with the year written on the outside.

Certificates from past camps, letters of congratulation for his Eagle Scout achievement

from Senator Richard Burr and even one from NASA share space, carefully organized, in a binder. Picture frames lean against the wall telling the stories of camps and honors from days gone by.

And it doesn't look like Denver will be the last Pope to earn the honor, either.

"I'm going to help my middle brother get his Eagle, then I'm going to help my little brother get his," he said.

Scouting has given a lot to the Pope family, so as you might imagine, Denver highly recommends that parents allow their kids to give it a try.

"It lets them meet new people from around the world," he said. "We've had troops from Japan and from the U.K. come to our camp at Tuscarora and have fun. And with the (Order of Arrow — an honor society for scouts), you get to meet even more people like that."

Pope graduated from South Johnston in June and is now pursuing a science degree at Johnston Community College. He hopes to then attend a four-year school to study aerospace engineering.

His main hobby, it seems, isn't on the table at all. It's parked behind the home he shares with his grandparents.

"It's a '98 Mustang," he said with a great deal of pride. "I blew it up, so I'm having to rebuild the engine and put it back together. I bought a book and watched some YouTube videos, but other than that it's just me learning as I go."

If his history of completing long, difficult tasks is any indication, the car should be running again in no time.



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# HALLOWEEN IN FOUR OAKS



Kayleigh Peppers dressed up as Mal from "The Descendants."

Photo by Samantha Peppers



Three and four year olds from Kids Academy visited the Four Oaks Post Office for some early trick-or-treating on Friday, Oct. 30.

Photo by Randy Capps



Dustin Chalkley dressed up as a ninja.

Photo by Angela Selleck



Myra Beasley, Elizabeth Sasser and Elaina Edmonds take a break from trick-or-treating.

Photo by Kristin Sasser.



# Remember the reason for the season

I got my first “Black Friday” advertisements recently and they served their purpose of reminding me the holidays are rapidly approaching us.

It perpetuates the thoughts and expectations of spending time and fellowshiping with family and friends to strengthen and recharge some of our most important relationships.

Those relationships are important to us and this time of year pushes us to remember those that are special in our lives with what we hope will be the perfect gift — and with that thought we are off and running into the madness that is the Christmas season. We go headlong into the hustle and bustle of the crowds, spending and searching for just the right gift — the right size, the right color, the right sentiment...

If we have large families or children we try to balance our spending out so no one gets slighted, and we have added the stress of coordinating re-gifting efforts to make sure we are not giving back any gifts to the original owner. While we are out engaged in these activities we are stressing and running down the most valuable gift we physically possess — ourselves.

As Christians, we have a much greater activity at this time of year that we should also engage ourselves into and remember what Christmas really represents for us and why we celebrate it.

It is the season of Advent, from the Latin word “adventus” and is translated as “the



coming” or “expectation.” Advent moves us to look at the expectation of a savior and the birth of Jesus Christ.

Advent is celebrated on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas and is a time of anticipation. It is marked by the spirit of expectation, preparation, excitement and fulfillment of the promise.

We have a longing and expectation for a gift that fills the empty parts of our lives and adds to the full parts as well. God did not have to be stressed in finding or providing the perfect gift for us. He created us in his image and He seeks a relationship with us where we feel His love for us through the life, death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ.

He provided the perfect gift for us, and when we accept that gift, then God’s expectation for a relationship and our expectation for a savior are both fulfilled and we can help others find their hope in life by seeing Jesus in our lives.

Advent looks forward in anticipation of the

birth of Jesus.

**John 1: 10-14 reads:** *He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. ... He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ... But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ... They are reborn — not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. ... So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*

The weeks of Advent bring us to celebrate Hope, Peace, Joy and Love all pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of these in the birth of Jesus. That is the perfect gift that we should focus our time and energy on at Christmas.

Hope, Peace, Love, Joy — all in God’s perfect gift for you at Christmas.

May the Hope of Christmas be ever in your minds.

May the Peace of Christmas be always in your hearts.

May the Joy of Christmas be the strength of your spirit.

May the Love and Christ of Christmas be lived in your lives so that others see Jesus through you.

Amen.

*Submitted by Pastor Sam Blackman,  
Beulah Hill Christian Church*



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# A Christmas tribute

There's a little stretch of highway in Meadow, not far from those lights you should make time to go see this month, called T-Bar Road.

It's a little over a mile long, and is named for Ted Barbour Jr., a farmer that passed away 25 years ago.

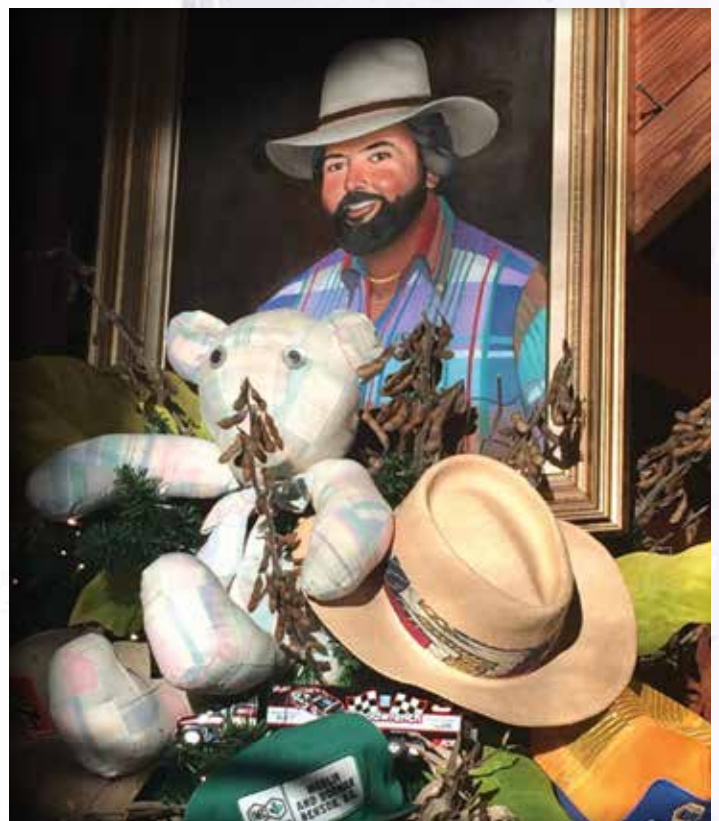
Usually, the road signs on either end of the country road are the most obvious nearby tributes to a man described as "always having a smile on his face."

But this month, they pale in comparison to his widow's Christmas tree.

Karen Barbour Gardner was happily married to Barbour the day he passed away. It was a week before Christmas, and after decorating the house for Christmas for the Barbours, Pat Johnson, owner of Pat's Florist in Four Oaks, came back and took it all down after she heard the news.

Ironically, Shane Smith, who many years later bought that flower shop and renamed it The Vine and Branch, was a small child living near the Barbours at the time.

"I can remember as a child her husband passing," he said. "Because we lived close by, it was a treat to go by (and see their house) during the season. The first part of the season, it was all decorated. And then it wasn't. It wasn't a full trip to the Meadow Lights until you went past her mother's house (next door), and I can remember going by there and seeing it not decorated. It was kind of sad."





Smith has been decorating trees for Gardner and her family for years, so perhaps it was fitting that he did this year's tribute to Barbour, on the anniversary of his passing.

"Last year, I lost count at about 40 trees," he said, of the number he handles in a season. "That's between the shop, my home and my clients' homes. I have one client this year that, in her home, we'll have eight Christmas trees. ... (But this one) is one of my very personal favorites, because of the story."

The tree in question sits in a beautiful barn that really feels and looks more like a cabin. Immediately, a visitor is stuck by the items on the tree.

Especially the hats.

"He was a very good man," Gardner said. "He grew up and became a farmer. He moved around a lot and met lots of people. All of those hats were his. He would save them wherever he went."

And, with a true Christmas spirit, she plans to do a bit of giving with them.

"My intention is, after Christmas, for the people that I know, like Mr. Maynard Barnes from Barnes and Lee, when it used to be the Chevrolet place in Benson," she said, pointing to a hat on the tree. "I'm going to give that hat back to him. I don't know if any of these people still have these hats."

Every hat on the tree has a story, and Gardner circles the tree, telling them all with warmth and charm.

There's a blue one nestled in between some branches that Ronnie Parker might recognize that reads "Four Oaks Gulf

Service."

"Ronnie had a store down there on Keen Road before the overpass came, and all the farmers went there," she said.

A red McCall's BBQ hat sits a couple feet to the left. Like an artifact from a museum, it's on loan from her brother-in-law, Worth Westbrook.

"When I was going through the hats back in the spring, that was in there," she said "Worth couldn't believe it. So, I gave it to him and they put it in the safe. But, I called him back and said 'I really need that hat back.'"

The top of the tree is also striking.

It's a portrait of Barbour, rosy cheeked and smiling from underneath a hat his mother encouraged him to wear to protect his ears from the sun.

"My brother-in-law (painted it)," she said. "We didn't have a picture of Ted with his hat on, believe it or not. Doug (Strickland) took a picture of his hat and painted it. He's done a lot of painting for Johnston Memorial."

A similar hat is perched higher than the rest.

"That was his summer hat," she said, pointing to a hat on the tree. "And when he was buried, we buried him with his winter hat. That was a very hard time, but the good Lord knows best."

The tree also contains the crops that Barbour used to grow.

"I found this that says 'God bless the farmer,'" she said, pointing to a sign in the tree. "Ted grew corn, tobacco, soybeans, squash, sweet potatoes — but I haven't found cabbage yet."

The corn, soybeans and sweet potatoes on the tree are actually from her harvest this year.

The tree is also adorned with racing trophies he won as a younger man, Bowie knives, Dale Earnhardt memorabilia and even some small rifles.

In contrast, just below the portrait, sits a teddy bear.

"My friend Kathy Lee, who owns the Korner Flea Market in Benson, her mom made that teddy bear for me, because it was such a hard time," she said.

The bear is made, in part, from the shirt he wore to his daughter Candi's high school graduation.

It's a remarkable memorial, and one that took a great deal of effort for both Gardner and Smith.

"It's a happy time," she said, when asked about the undertaking. "But it's a good time to reflect. On the past, the future and all of the things that you've been blessed with."

"This tree brought back a lot of memories for me," Smith said. "The hats and the different things and the nostalgia. Those are hats like my dad wore, and some of them are from old family businesses from all around and in Four Oaks. You know, days gone by."

"It's just a very special tree. And just to see how she reacted to it when it was finished. It was a totally different reaction than she's ever had before."

So special, in fact, that it might just be the brightest Christmas light, so to speak, in Meadow this year.

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# Taking Old School Road to the top of the charts

Nobody seemed to notice the fog that had crept in until it started drifting past the stage lights, creating an atmosphere vaguely reminiscent of a Prince video. Seeming to read my thoughts, Russell Johnson strummed his mandolin between songs and spoke into the microphone:

"I bet you've never seen a fog machine at a bluegrass show before."

A ripple of chuckles spread over the crowd, which was surprisingly large, I thought, on such a chilly night.

I sat with my dad and some friends on the outdoor patio of Mac's Tavern, a friendly, low-key restaurant and pub off of Walnut Street in Cary.

On first glance it seemed pretty typical, until I stepped out the side door and onto a large enclosed patio with a covered wooden stage, across the back of which a large green-and-white banner displayed the logo of the Grass Cats.

The popular bluegrass band plays there once a month to a reliably enthusiastic audience. I could feel the pull of fandom myself, though this was my first Grass Cats show and, outside of Allison Krauss and my marriage to a Kentucky native, I didn't know that much about bluegrass. As I was to discover, it would be literally impossible not to at least bob my foot in time to the music.

Of the five men on stage, two were familiar to me, both being Four Oaks natives: Russell Johnson, lead tenor vocalist and mandolin player, and Bailey Coe, guitarist and vocalist.

I'd known Bailey from church for years but had yet to hear him sing until that night. He's the youngest member of the Grass Cats and also the newest, having joined the band six months ago.

Back at the microphone, Russell introduced the rest of the band: electric bass player and member for over 13 years, Tim Woodall; fiddle player Chris Hill and Rick Lafleur, banjo player and physicist (for real — he's got a PhD in physics) who hails from Ontario, Canada and yet, as I heard that night, sings a pretty darn convincing Johnny Cash during the band's rendition of "Ring of Fire."

Every single one of them sings. Well.

Two days earlier, I had sat down with Russell in the lobby of Sloan Communications on Main Street in Four Oaks.

News around town was that the Grass Cats had a current number-one song on two different bluegrass charts and that that song, "The Old School Road," was named after a familiar road into town. I wanted to discuss the roots



Melissa Eakin



The Grass Cats performing their rendition of "Ring of Fire" at Mac's Tavern.



of both the band and the song and so I went straight to the source with the band's founder and the song's writer.

Russell came to bluegrass early, starting with a guitar for Christmas at the age of ten.

"My brother Hal came home from college with his roommate who played banjo," he said. "Hal played guitar. They'd come home and they'd play bluegrass on the picnic table — I can see it in my head right now as plain as when it happened. That might've been the first live music I ever saw besides at church. I loved it."

He smiled at the memory.

"When I got to Carolina in the fall of '81, my brother and his old roommate and I would get together and we would have these jam sessions on the weekend," he said. "After awhile, I wanted to switch it up and play another instrument so I got a mandolin on February 14, 1982. I remember when my dad bought it at what used to be the old drugstore at 42 and Ten-Ten Road. Anyway, that's how I first got exposed to making music."

Russell's been part of one bluegrass band or another since 1989, starting with two guys he met and jammed with at Hoffman's Stringed Instruments in Raleigh. They formed a group they called The Uncut Grass.

They were chosen to be an International Bluegrass Music Association showcase band in 1991, and subsequently discovered another band had a similar name. They then changed their name to New Vintage. After several years and multiple awards, a side group evolved from jam sessions with guys from several other bands. This side group ultimately became the Grass Cats.

"I always try to keep something else going musically besides the main band, just for the creative part of it and to work with other people," he explained. "I have a band with my wife Kandis, Emily Kirsch, my cousin Spencer Mobley, Matt Hooper and Julie Elkins called Diamond Creek. It's a super band. Great musicians. It is straight-up bluegrass, but it allows me to play music with Kandis, who plays upright bass."

He paused with a grin.

"So we're figuring out if we can play music together and not kill each other," he said.

I asked about Kirsch, whose name was familiar. She had played in a bluegrass band called Supper Break with Coe (her cousin) at my wedding in April of 2011.

It had turned out to be the infamous "Day of All the Tornadoes" and Supper Break had saved my first dance with my new husband at the reception when, due to the power outage, my prerecorded song of choice couldn't be played on the sound system.

The band had jumped right in, playing an acoustic song that was just perfect and, given their young voices and the surreal circumstances, sweetly poignant.

"Emily was a student of mine and one of the best singers I've ever been in the same room with," Russell said. "Her grandmother came to me to give her guitar lessons the summer after her seventh grade year and now she's a sophomore at Campbell. I included her on my solo project when she was 14 years old."

Unaware that he'd given lessons, I asked him what that had been about for him.

"I think everybody takes lessons in hopes of creating music with other people — at least I hope they do," he said. "It's a powerful thing when you first stand in a circle with other people and you're playing music that works together."

Curious, I asked how Coe had come to the Grass Cats.

"Bailey was a former student of mine. When he went to college, we didn't completely lose touch but I wasn't around him like when I was giving him lessons," he said. "I knew he was a good musician and that he'd started singing. His mother and I go to the same gym and she told me about some YouTube videos he'd done and gave me a demo. He was playing guitar then and I had taught him mandolin. I heard him sing and I was like 'oh my gosh.'"

He paused in thought before continuing reflectively.

"His voice sounds a hundred years old and he's just twenty-two," he said. "And when I say a hundred years old, that's a good thing."

He smiled.

"It sounds like he just rolled out of some coal-mining town in West Virginia and he's already lived the hardest life you can imagine," he said. "That translates to bluegrass tremendously."

My curiosity finally got the better of me and I asked to hear the story behind the Grass Cats' latest hit, "The Old School Road", the chorus of which had been stuck in my head for the past two days.

"It was named Old School Road because there used to be an old school on our farm," he said, speaking of the road itself. "It was called the Old Royal School. The last year that it operated was 1929."

He smiled at my raised eyebrows. This was a bit of history I wasn't familiar with.

"The songwriter in me was thinking, 'Old School Road...there's got to be a song or a hook there,'" he said. "So I came up with 'You can't go wrong when you're raised up right on the Old School Road'. To 'grow up right' meaning right on the road itself or just 'growing up right.'"

He looked briefly at the ceiling, thinking.

"It's very truthful," he said. "My mother passed away when I was 18. She was only 48 and had a massive heart attack. I go back and I think about all the things my parents tried to instill in me. But when you're 18, it doesn't matter what they say, you're just so defiant and think you know everything."

"Boy, as I've gotten older, I have really figured out that they meant the best in the world and everything they told me has come true. So the song's about a way of life. And even though it sounds like it's an old country way, I think it can be that way of life in today's society and during today's times. It's the upbringing and instilling values in your kids. That song really does mean something to me, just because I lived it."

His broad smile returned.

"And I'm not going to lie — it was a good hook," he said. "You can't go wrong..."

He chuckled.

"It wouldn't have mattered if it would've never charted," he said. "I liked the song so much I'd still want to sing it."

"But it did chart," I remarked with a grin.

"It did chart," he said, still smiling. "Went to number one on the Power Source music chart, number one on the Bluegrass Today chart... it got as high as number two on Roots Music Report."

It's the fourth No.1 hit for the Grass Cats.

There were a lot of happy people at Mac's Tavern that chilly night two days later as the Grass Cats continued their show.

They included a few covers (Bob Dylan, Alan Jackson, Johnny Cash) and a gospel song called "Somebody Touched Me."

The second set was wrapping up and despite the fog, the smiles and claps never abated throughout the show. During the break between sets, there were hugs and some catching up with Bailey and his family; some handshakes and introductions.

I was cold and the napkins on the table were droopy with the moisture in the air, but stars blinked periodically through the fog and no one seemed anxious to go inside; conversation and laughter filled the patio.

It had been a good night. Thankfully, there was still more show to come.

"We've got some special visitors from Four Oaks out here tonight," Russell announced from the stage, to cheers and claps from my table. "We'd like to get them up here more often."

*Melissa Eakin can be reached at [mms.eakin@gmail.com](mailto:mms.eakin@gmail.com)*

## Serving up a New York pizzeria-style menu in Four Oaks

Walk into Papa's Subs & Pizza in Four Oaks, and there's an excellent chance you'll see the owner, Yousef Amiri, buzzing around behind the counter.

Most people don't know that, had he had not walked into a New York City pizzeria more than two decades ago, he probably wouldn't be here today.

After studying at Old Dominion and Norfolk State in the Tidewater region of Virginia, Amiri moved north to take a job with AT&T in Connecticut.

"It didn't go right," he said. "I always wanted to be my own boss. I didn't want to work for anybody."

So, with that in the back of his mind, he was wandering around New York.

"I'd drive into the city, Manhattan," he said. "Walking around. I saw a pizza place, and it was unbelievable. The people standing in line outside around the building. At the other pizza places, it was just a pizza maker standing behind a counter and looking outside."

He knew he wanted to be part of it.

"Since I had some (pizza making) experience when I was in school, I decided to try it," he said. "But it had to be at this place. The next morning, I got up early and went to the place and said, 'I'm looking for a job.'"

He was talking to John Castellotti, the manager at John's Of Bleecker Street, which has been a New York City institution in its cozy spot near 6th Avenue since 1929. Their website boasts testimonials from Regis Philbin, Vanilla Ice and Jack Black and is a favorite eating place for locals.

"He said, 'I have four people here, and I only have one T-shirt. So whoever makes the better pizza is going to stay.'"

Even though it was the first time he ever cooked with a charcoal oven, he wound up with the shirt.

He worked there for more than a decade, learning all he could about the restaurant business, until his friend and mentor passed



Yousef Amiri preparing Papa's delicious lasagna.

away.

"I couldn't make it," he said. "Everywhere I went, I saw John. He was like a father to me. There was a guy across the street working in an Italian restaurant. I told him, 'you're dying to work here. Let me teach you.' I taught him, handed him the key and I left. I've never been back there."

He decided to take a trip to Florida for a vacation, stopped in Mebane for gas and got lost.

He wandered into a burger place, decided to buy it and has owned and operated restaurants in eastern North Carolina — in Mebane, Raleigh and Holly Springs, to name a few — ever since.

"Johnston County is really a perfect market," he said of his decision to open the Four Oaks location about 16 years ago. "I'm proud of my customers. They're smart. They know what they're eating. They know why they're coming here."

What they're eating is the same pizza gobbled up by movie stars and athletes in the heart of

America's largest city.

Well, almost the same.

"It was the best pizza you can eat," he said. "I use all the same stuff here. The only problem is the water. The water is not the same as New York water. And, of course, the oven."

The secret, it seems, is the ingredients. Papa's uses fresh vegetables, high quality meats and real cheese to make all of the dishes available on the menu. It costs more, but folks can taste the difference.

"I'm not going to get rich. I'm not going to be a millionaire," he said. "I'm not going to play with these young kids' lives. I'm not going to give them artificial cheese. I go to the farmer's market three times a week to make sure I'm getting the best products possible."

"And, in return, I have great customers. People really value the place, and that's enough for me."

It's not the same pizza you can get at larger shops, but that's the idea.

"I respect them all," he said of the chains with which he competes. "They're trying to make



some money. They're using some frozen stuff, and with the dough, they're using a lot of preservatives to keep the product alive. My pizza is not cheap pizza. (People) pay for it. The money they pay is the same money that people who go to the other places will have to pay the doctor later. We do what we think is right."

That includes passing along his knowledge of cooking and the restaurant to a younger generation.

Recently, visitors to the restaurant may have seen a much younger face behind the counter.

Justin Ormond is a Clayton native who moved to Four Oaks a few years ago. He's brimming with enthusiasm about cooking and ideas about the future, which explains why Amiri hired him to be the restaurant's new manager.

"Ever since I was a kid, I grew up learning how to cook from my parents and grandparents," Ormond said. "My grandmother (Linda Parrish) owned a restaurant, and that was my first job. Ever since then, I knew it's what I wanted to do. I wanted to get into the restaurant business and own my own



The staff takes a break to pose for a photo. They are, left to right, are Mara, Kandi, Yousef, Chris, Hena and Justin.

restaurant. Everything I've done since then has been steps toward doing that."

For Amiri, it's a chance to share what he's learned. But, he says he isn't planning to retire anytime soon.

"For somebody like me, working 100 hours a week, it's suicide to go home and sit down," he said.

Until that day comes, Ormond plans to soak up all that he can.

"Mr. Yousef gave me a golden opportunity to come in here and run the place for him, and I jumped on it," he said. "Best decision I've

made so far. ... I love to cook, and bring people happiness through my food. Just being able to do that, and to feed people, that means something."

Talk with him for a few minutes, and it's not hard to see how grateful he is for this opportunity.

"Out of all the restaurants I've worked in, I've never had anyone put as much heart and soul into what they do as this man right here," he said, pointing to Yousef. "You can tell the difference in quality, and how much he cares about what he does. I've never worked for anyone like this before."

Amiri cites support from the three local schools, the Four Oaks Police Department and area businesses like KS Bank and House Autry for their contributions to his success.

"I want to tell my customers that I really appreciate them and love them," Amiri said. "Anything I can do for the community, I'm happy to help. I appreciate them (and the Chamber) accepting me as part of this town and this community. I thank God for all of these good friends."

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## SAVE THE DATE

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

**Every Wednesday, 10:30 a.m.**

**Story Time - James Bryan Creech Library, Four Oaks**  
Come out for story time at the library each Wednesday morning. For more information, call (919) 963-6013.

**December 3, 7 p.m.**

**Smithfield Christmas Tree Lighting**  
Join us as we light the town's Christmas tree and officially bring in the holiday season. The tree is located at the corner of Third and Market streets, in front of the Library. Enjoy hot chocolate, entertainment and a special visitor from the North Pole.

**December 4, 6 to 8 p.m.**

**Swim with Santa**  
Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center  
Bring your bathing suit and towel and join Santa for a little swim before he gets too busy with the Christmas rush. Swim a little, and enjoy cookies and milk — Santa's favorites! SRAC members are free, and a small admission fee applies for non-members. An adult must be in the pool with all children under the age of 5. For more information, call 919-934-1408.

**December 5, noon to 7 p.m.**

**Four Oaks Christmas Parade and Celebration**  
There will be vendors and holiday music in Barbour's Grove Park from noon until 7 p.m. Santa will be in the park before and after the parade, which starts at 4 p.m. The Christmas tree lighting in the park is set for 6:30 p.m. For more information, call 919-963-4004 or email FourOaksAreaChamber@gmail.com.

**December 5, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

**Soap Crafting - Arboretum at JCC**  
Looking for the perfect Christmas stocking stuffer? Create decorative soaps in time for the holidays. Participants will go home with one pound of hand crafted soap. Cost is \$25. For more information, call (919) 209-2052.

**Grinch Stink Stank Stunk 5K and Jingle Bell Jog December 5**

Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center  
Don't be a GRINCH! Join us as we partner with Smithfield Police Department, Smithfield Kiwanis Club, WTSB Radio, Bullock Brothers and Friends of the Park in a race that collects toys to benefit Harbor House and the Johnston County DSS Angel Tree Project! The registration fee for this race is an unwrapped toy. There will also be prizes awarded for some of your favorite "Who from Whoville" characters, so dress up, have fun and enter the costume contest. Registration forms are available at SRAC, or can be downloaded from the town's website at [www.Smithfield-nc.com](http://www.Smithfield-nc.com). For more information, call 919-934-1408.

**December 10, 7 p.m.**

**Smithfield Christmas Parade**  
Christmas really arrives when the Christmas parade rolls into town. For questions or more information contact Tiffany Pearson at 919-934-2148, ext. 107.

**December 12, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

**Wreath making with Natural Materials**  
Arboretum at JCC  
Create beautiful wreaths from natural materials for your holiday door! This 'hands-on' workshop will cover materials for wreath making and weaving them into attractive wreaths. Each participant leaves with a beautiful, festive wreath. Cost is \$25. For more information, call (919) 209-2052.

**December 16, 10:30 a.m.**

**Story Time with Santa**  
James Bryan Creech Public Library  
Santa will join us for stories, music and will be giving each child a small gift. We are excited that Santa could take time out from his busy schedule to visit! We ask for patience as Santa makes time to speak to each child and parents are welcome to bring their own camera to take pictures. For more information, call 919-963-6013.

CELEBRATING  
CHRISTMAS  
AT THE  
LIBRARY!

**December 19, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**SRAC Kids Night**  
Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center  
When SRAC closes, the fun begins! Drop your kids off in a safe, supervised environment that is kid friendly and parent free. Swimming, gym time, snacks and other organized activities are offered throughout the night for kids ages 5-10. If you pre-register, the fee is \$8 for Smithfield residents and \$13.50 for non-Smithfield residents. Each additional child is \$5. Fees are \$2 more for residents and \$3 more for non-residents if you register on the day of the event. For more information, call 919-934-1408.

**December 20, 10 a.m.**

**Holiday to Holy Day Service**  
Freedom Family Fellowship Church, Lassiter Road, Four Oaks  
Come hear a message dedicated to connecting in a special way with our savior and entering into the true Christmas spirit. The message will be "Discovering the 'Christmas' Jesus." We will have communion and special singing. All are invited. No denomination, no performance and no religion. Just Jesus and the family of God celebrating His birth. For more information, call 919-795-9045.

**December 24, 1:30 to 4 p.m.**

**Christmas Eve at the Library**  
James Bryan Creech Public Library  
Spend part of Christmas Eve at the Library. Enjoy coffee, hot chocolate, light snacks and great conversation. "The Polar Express" will be shown starting at 2 p.m. For more, call 919-963-6013.

CELEBRATING  
CHRISTMAS  
AT THE  
LIBRARY!

**December 30-31**

**Lego Winter Wonderland Workshop**  
Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center  
If you love working with LEGOS, you'll love this! Join us as we dive into our massive collection of LEGOS, and build to your heart's desire. The experience is joyful, and the impact long-lasting. There are separate workshops for 5-7 year olds and 8-12 year olds, and the cost for each is \$55. For registration details and workshop descriptions, visit [bit.ly/LEGO-Winter-Break-Camp](http://bit.ly/LEGO-Winter-Break-Camp).

To add your organization's events to the calendar,  
email us at [hello@fouroaksjournal.com](mailto:hello@fouroaksjournal.com)



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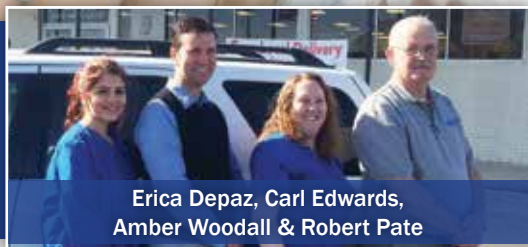
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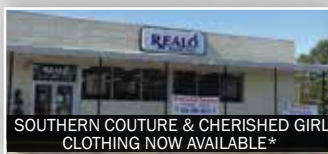


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