Selected *Delaware Beach Life* features from Chris Beakey

Coastal Postal Treasure

Its historic character undimmed, the Lewes Post Office still delivers a timeless sense of pride — and belonging

By Chris Beakey | Photographs by Carolyn Watson

If you've ever wanted to slip back 100 years or so into Lewes history, the post office on Front Street is a good place to start. Virtually unchanged since 1915, its lobby is an airy space with tiger-striped oak woodwork, dentil moldings, and a frosted glass door to the postmaster's office. In contrast to utilitarian post offices typically found in modern suburbs, this relic of the past is a warm and welcoming place that invites you to linger even after you've picked up your mail.

And then there's that stairway off to the right, with its gracefully turned balustrade, leading to rooms you can't quite see beyond the second-floor landing ...

A grand stairway, circa 1915, leads to a second floor that has long been a source of curiosity among residents and visitors.

Although visitors may wonder about those mysterious second-story spaces, any reveries are cut short when they're invited — typically after a short wait — to the counter, where the staff stands ready from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, and on Saturdays until 12:30 p.m.

"I've made so many trips to that post office over the past 16 years, and am always astounded by the efficiency and friendliness of the place," says Lewes resident Al Salas. He's even more impressed by "the lengths they went to when we moved to our new house."

That new house is adjacent to the boatyard on the Lewes-and-Rehoboth Canal, one of many new developments near the town's core. The clerks were just barely familiar with the postal arrangements for the new neighborhood on the day Salas moved in, yet they were happy to take extra steps to ensure that his mail would be delivered on time.

Lewes resident Shawn Swider picks up mail from his vintage post office box. Dentil molding along the lobby ceiling is a testament to the grandeur of civic architecture. Postal workers Joe Panzer and Donna Atsidis, on facing page, offer customers friendly, efficient counter service.

Historic presence, modern service

Appreciation for that level of service is shared by longtime Lewes resident Bruce Chandler, who was one of the lead organizers of the Preserve Our Post Office campaign organized to mark the building's 100th anniversary in 2013. (The date is based on the year the cornerstone was laid, even though the post office didn't open until 1915.)

Chandler had always loved the building's architecture and historical significance. But he felt its fading presence and untended grounds could use some sprucing up. With support from Postmaster William Osienski, the campaign gave local residents, the Lewes Chamber of Commerce and the Lewes in Bloom volunteer organization an opportunity to do just that.

"Once Bruce had the idea, everyone wanted in on it," recalls Kevin McBride, a landscape architect and owner of Renaissance Design Studio,

who also volunteered in the effort.

Lewes in Bloom has tended the grounds through every season in the ensuing years, accentuating the building's commanding presence as one of the town's major historic landmarks. That effort is part of a nationwide movement to preserve downtown post offices. Many of those involved are driven by a love of historic architecture, and of the role these buildings have played in the nation's civic life.

"In America, nearly every city and town has, or at least used to have, at least one iconic type of building, frequently historic in character, that supported the community's downtown vitality," notes Kaid Benfield, director of the sustainable communities/smart growth program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, in a recent *Atlantic Monthly* essay. The article's title: "Why old post offices still matter."

The building has a presence as one of the town's major historic landmarks.

Indeed, post offices, city halls, public libraries and public schools built in the first half of the 20th century (and earlier) are among the most prevalent examples of civic architecture, a term used to describe public buildings that figure prominently in the lives of everyday citizens. As noted in a National Park Service description of the National Register of Historic Places, the federal government once promoted the belief that these buildings should be "monumental and beautiful" to "represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities."

This belief factored significantly into New Deal projects undertaken during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. Tens of thousands of public buildings and infrastructure projects were constructed through the Works Progress Administration by workers who had been idled by Great Depression. More than 1,000 were post offices, many of which are listed on the National Register.

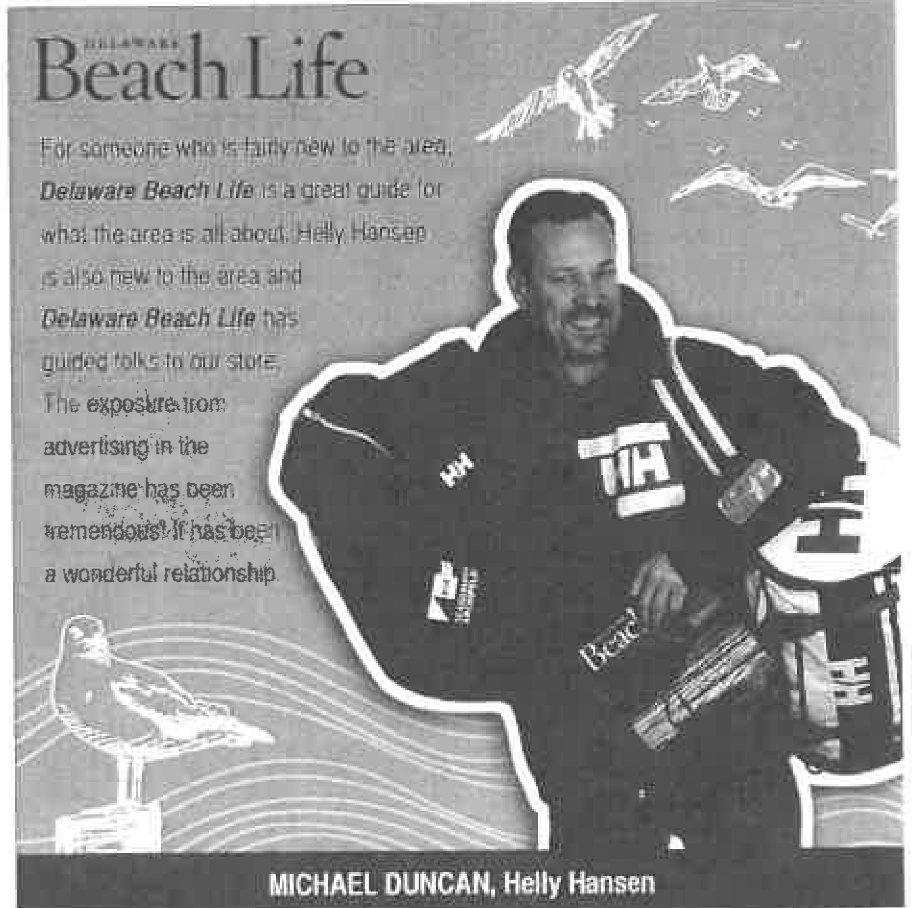
Through the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, the New Deal also brought high-quality artwork to public buildings, including about 1,400 post office murals that still exist. One example, titled "Frontier Mail," is at the Rehoboth Post Office. It was painted in 1940 by Karl Knaths, whose works can be found in many museums, including the Smithsonian. It's one of six post office murals in Delaware, and captures the essence of the public works art movement

Always accepting new patients...
MAPLEWOOD
DENTAL
ASSOCIATES
Dr. Steven B. Wright, DMD
Dr. Daniel A. Luckenbaugh, DDS
Dr. Kyle D. Green, DDS
Providing all aspects of dental care for the entire family
Periodontist on Staff
Emergencies Welcome
Established 1968
302-645-6671
18912 John J. Williams Hwy., Rehoboth, DE
www.RehobothBeachSmiles.com

MEGEE
covers it all!

Cooling Heating Plumbing Electrical

302-581-9797 www.megeeco.com
24 HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICE



because it can be enjoyed by citizens going about their everyday lives.

"Unfortunately," Benfield notes, "with modern communication options being what they are, the functions of the U.S. Postal Service have dropped off." This trend has spurred plans by the U.S. Postal Service to consider closing as many as 4,000 post offices around the country, a move that prompted the National Trust for Historic Preservation to name some of them to its annual "11 Most Endangered Places" list.

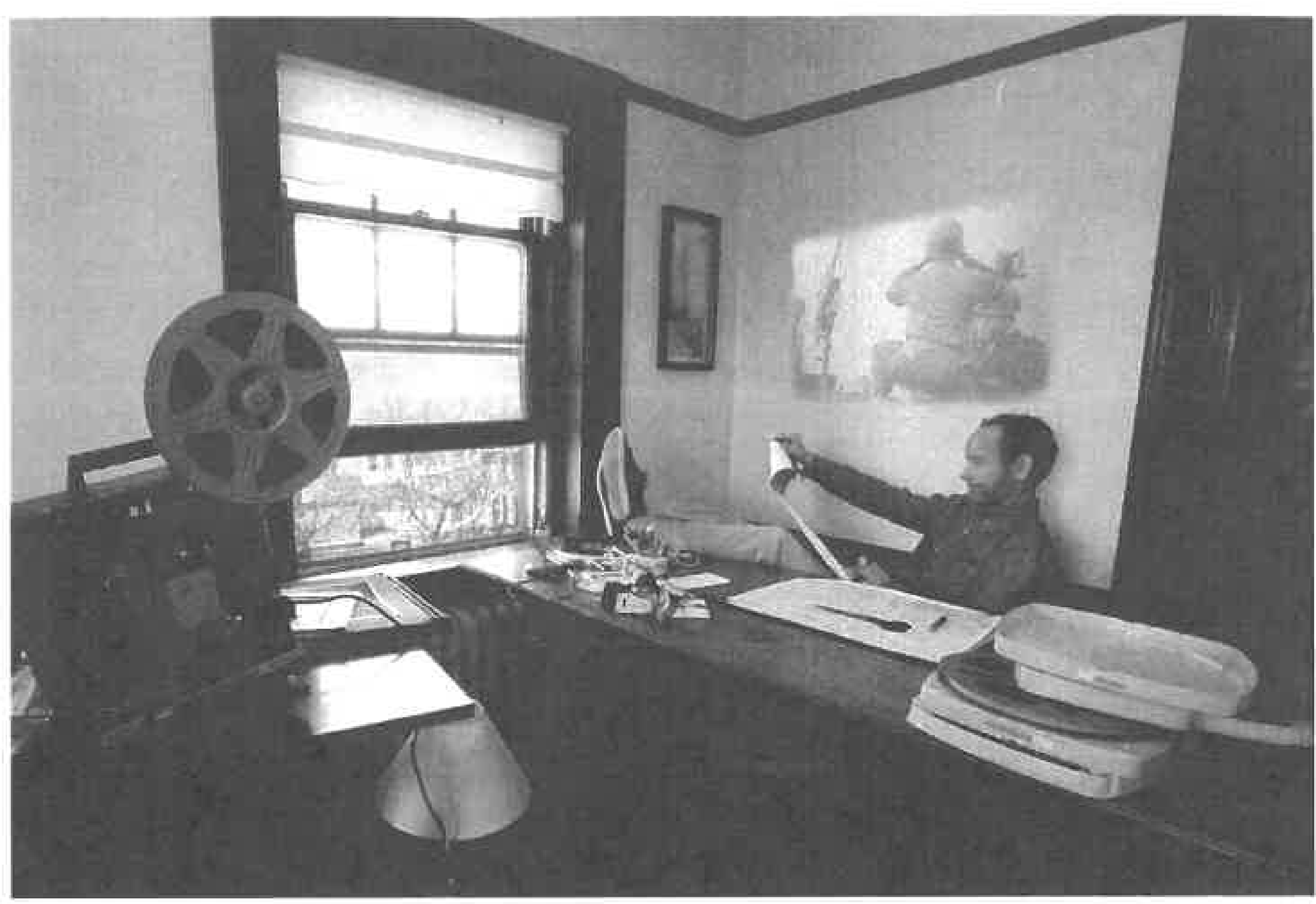
For now, the Lewes Post Office appears to be safe from closure, a relief to many local preservationists who promise to respond quickly and forcefully if that changes, and to many others who enjoy picking up and sending mail in a downtown location.

From neighborly to noir: A trip upstairs

Even so, there's much more to the building than the transactions at the postal counter. Because if you take those stairs to the second floor, you'll step into a suite of rooms that reflect Lewes's role in the security of the entire Delmarva region during the first few decades of the last century.

At its inception, the edifice that houses the post office was known as the Lewes Federal Building. As such, it was home to offices for the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs Service, and the Superintendent of the Light House, all of which were important to maritime safety.

In keeping with that era's philosophy of civic architecture, the upstairs space conveys the same stately atmosphere as the rooms



Filmmaker Michael Fountain reviews his vast collection of World War II newsreels in his studio on the second floor at the Lewes Post Office. Postmaster William Osienski's office, at left, is reached by one of many original frosted glass doors.

below. The floors are oak, scuffed by 100-plus years of foot traffic yet still conveying a sense of quality workmanship and solidity. Beneath a 10-foot ceiling the rectangular hallway is lined with paneled oak doors with frosted glass designed to bring light into the interior offices. Every one of the offices features the same heavy woodwork surrounding tall windows, which look out upon the Lewes townscape.

From the hallways to the offices, the entire space has a film noir feel. Anyone familiar with detective movies from the '40s and '50s will find it easy to imagine a hard-boiled private eye in the shadowy light of these spaces.

From the hallways to the offices, the entire space has a film noir feel.

"I love the architecture and look of the place — it's a great space for working," says Michael Fountain, a filmmaker who rents one of the second-floor offices. "The light is amazing, and so is being able to open a window and look out over the water and hear the sounds of gulls and boat traffic on the canal."

Fountain, who has produced several series and documentaries for The Discovery Channel as well as the award-winning "Bonecrusher," has used the office as a creative space since 2013.

Down the hall is an office occupied by software sales executive Rowland Bradley.

"As a tech guy I've worked in places lined with cubicles, and I know all about the cliche about people in tech being gearheads who don't like to interact with people," Bradley says on a recent tour of his office. "I'm not like that at all. Working here makes me feel connected to Lewes and to all of our good friends here, and I especially love the amazing craftsmanship in this building."

Longtime Lewes residents share this appreciation for the second floor, though often in the context of their own memories. Nancy Grasing, who served as the postmaster from 1961 through 1990, often visited her father in those second-

floor offices during his time with the Coast Guard. And area historian Hazel Brittingham has one particularly fond memory of the place during World War II.

"There were 18 girls and six boys in my class at Lewes High School," she says while sifting through historic photos on a recent afternoon. "Those weren't good odds if you wanted a date for the junior dance, which is why a lot of us went out with Coast Guard guys. The boy I went with had just learned how to type. That got him a nice indoor job in one of those offices on the second floor."

Affection for the building's history and setting isn't lost on the postal employees, including Laura Hatfield, who transferred to the Lewes location in 2016.

"The best thing about working here — it's got to be that view," she says on a recent Saturday morning as she gazes out from the postal counter toward 1812 Memorial Park and the Lewes-and-Rehoboth Canal. "I also love all the questions I get about this old building and all the creaky sounds it makes. It's nice to know it's all original after all these years."

Preserving history, protecting a civic resource

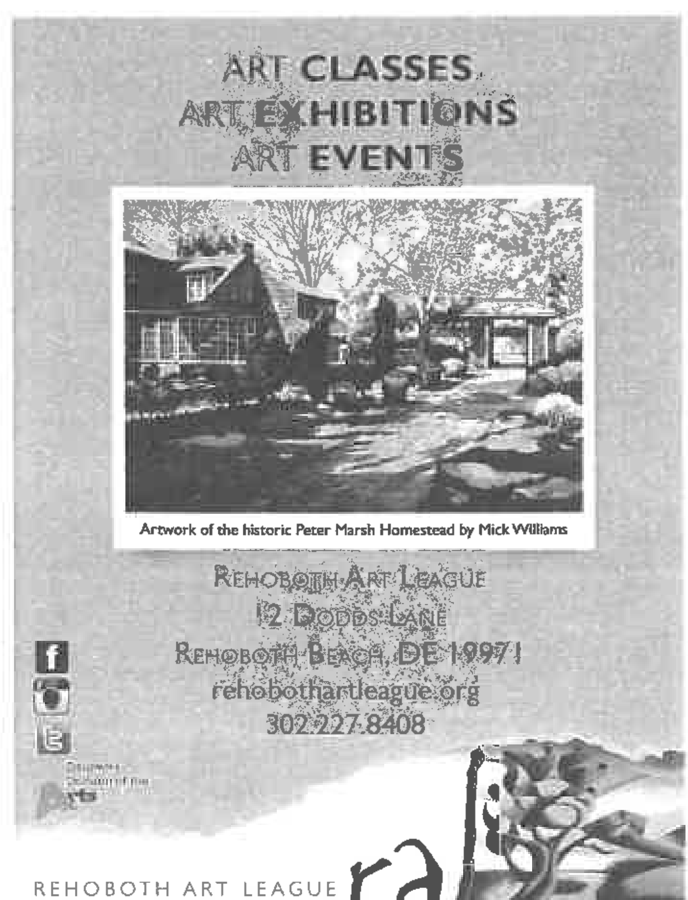
Mike DiPaolo, the executive director of the Lewes Historical Society, pays close attention to these types of sentiments as he and his staff work to develop an accurate narrative about the role of the post office in the development of the region.

Such oral histories, he says, "often lead us to answers and more questions. But from a historical perspective you want the documentation."

He makes this observation while examining the building's original blueprints, which show something else that made the structure remarkable: At the center of the second floor was a large, rectangular open space that stretched all the way to the roof, designed to bring light and air into the hallway and offices long before air conditioning was even a consideration. (The opening was later closed.)

The historical society also has another artifact that's a testament to post office history — a 4-foot-tall freestanding plywood depiction of "Mr. ZIP," a cartoon character created in the 1960s to encour-

The old post office boxes have withstood the test of time. Software sales executive RowlandBradley takes in the Lewes townscape from his office.



age people to use ZIP codes. Mr. ZIP presided over the Lewes Post Office lobby during that time, reminding people that Lewes mail was delivered to the 19958 ZIP code. Then, as now, signs of changing times coexisted just fine with the historic architectural features that endure today.

While relishing that architecture, Bruce Chandler emphasizes that the post office is also a space for social interaction and civic pride.

"Sometimes when I look at everything that's gone into that building, I want to turn around and say to someone, 'Do you see what I see?'" he says. "Because what *I* see is a building that will never fall and that still serves its purpose well as a testament to the written word. It represents us as a people. An ideal philosophy for public spaces. It's always been an iconic building at Front and Bank streets, the busiest little corner in Lewes, where you're always apt to run into someone you know."

"It really has withstood the test of time," he adds. "All it needs is a little shining up so it stays as beautiful as it is forever."

Chris Beakey, *of Lewes, is the author of two novels. The latest, "Fatal Option," was published in February by Post Hill Press and Simon & Schuster.*

By Chris Beakey | Photographs by Kevin Fleming

Lenny and Amy Pollitt carry on the tradition at Lloyd's Market, which was started by Amy's parents, Lloyd and Dottie Purcell.

Market Value

Lloyd's isn't just a place to buy groceries. The Lewes store connects customers to a simpler, and perhaps more satisfying, time.

Should you find Libby Lynch, who was born in Beebe Hospital 90 years ago, sitting on her porch at Market and Third streets in Lewes, she'll be happy to reminisce about "the old days" when locals bought most of their clothing, home goods and groceries in town.

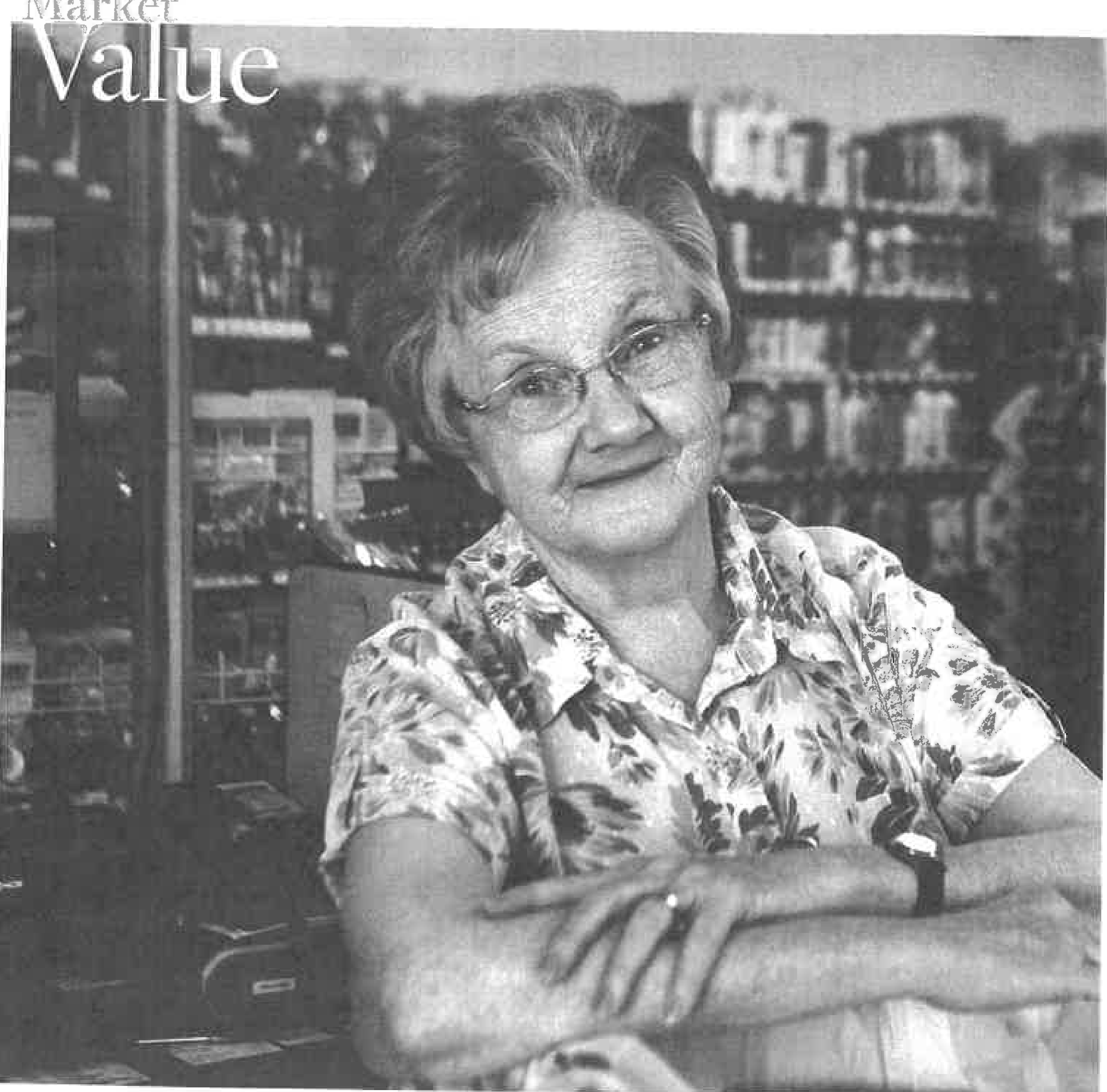
It might seem like those days are gone forever — unless you've visited Lloyd's Market on Savannah Road, which has been owned and operated by Lloyd and Dottie Purcell since 1971. The market today is much as it's always been, with quaint signs on the large front windows advertising specials, chickens turning on a rotisserie next to the fisherman's cooler where fresh crabmeat and oysters are kept on ice, and four cozy aisles where a cart can be loaded with a week's worth of groceries in short order.

"I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have that store right here in town," Lynch says after a recent shopping trip, where Lloyd's staff and a neighbor who arrived at the same time lent her a hand. "I think I've known everyone who's worked there — they've all been really good people."

> ***"I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have that store right here in town."***

Photos of many store employees are prominently displayed near the entrance. Some have worked at Lloyd's for decades, forging strong connections to customers and to the Delmarva farmers who supply more than 90 percent of Lloyd's produce during the summer months. Among those farmers are 10-year-old Cailan Wilkinson and his 5-year-old brother, Aiden, the unlikely purveyors of Brothers Organic Produce. The boys' family began growing vegetables

Market Value



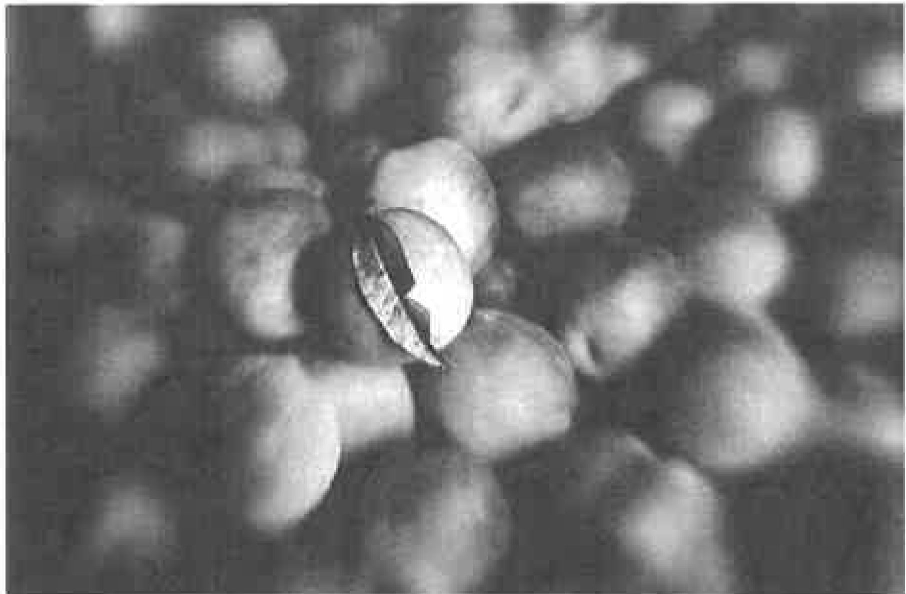
at their Mulberry Street home in Lewes in 2012 before moving to a larger property on Gills Neck Road last year. Today, the Wilkinsons count on Lloyd's as a first stop when they bring their harvests to market.

Their mom, Melanie, explains how the relationship with the store began: "The boys started out with their stand by the sidewalk and by making brown bag deliveries to a few people in town. But when it came to thinking beyond that, my husband, who's a local, knew exactly where they could go. He made a call, and Lenny met them at the back door, and told them he'd be happy to sell their produce."

Lenny is Lloyd's son-in-law. He's worked at the store alongside his wife, Amy, and Lloyd and Dottie's son, Darren, for 20 years. They all enjoy sharing memories of the early days, when Dottie — driving her red pickup known as "Big Red" — procured much of the produce from farmers on the back roads from Dover to Lewes. And, as de facto spokespeople for Lloyd, who prefers to stay out of the spotlight, they also share a special kind of pride in the store's unique way of doing business.

"There's this cliche about small markets — people automatically think they're going to have to pay more, until they come in and see that's just not true," Darren says after a long morning spent stocking shelves. "No one in this family's getting rich from this store, but we've survived by keeping prices low. Plus we all really

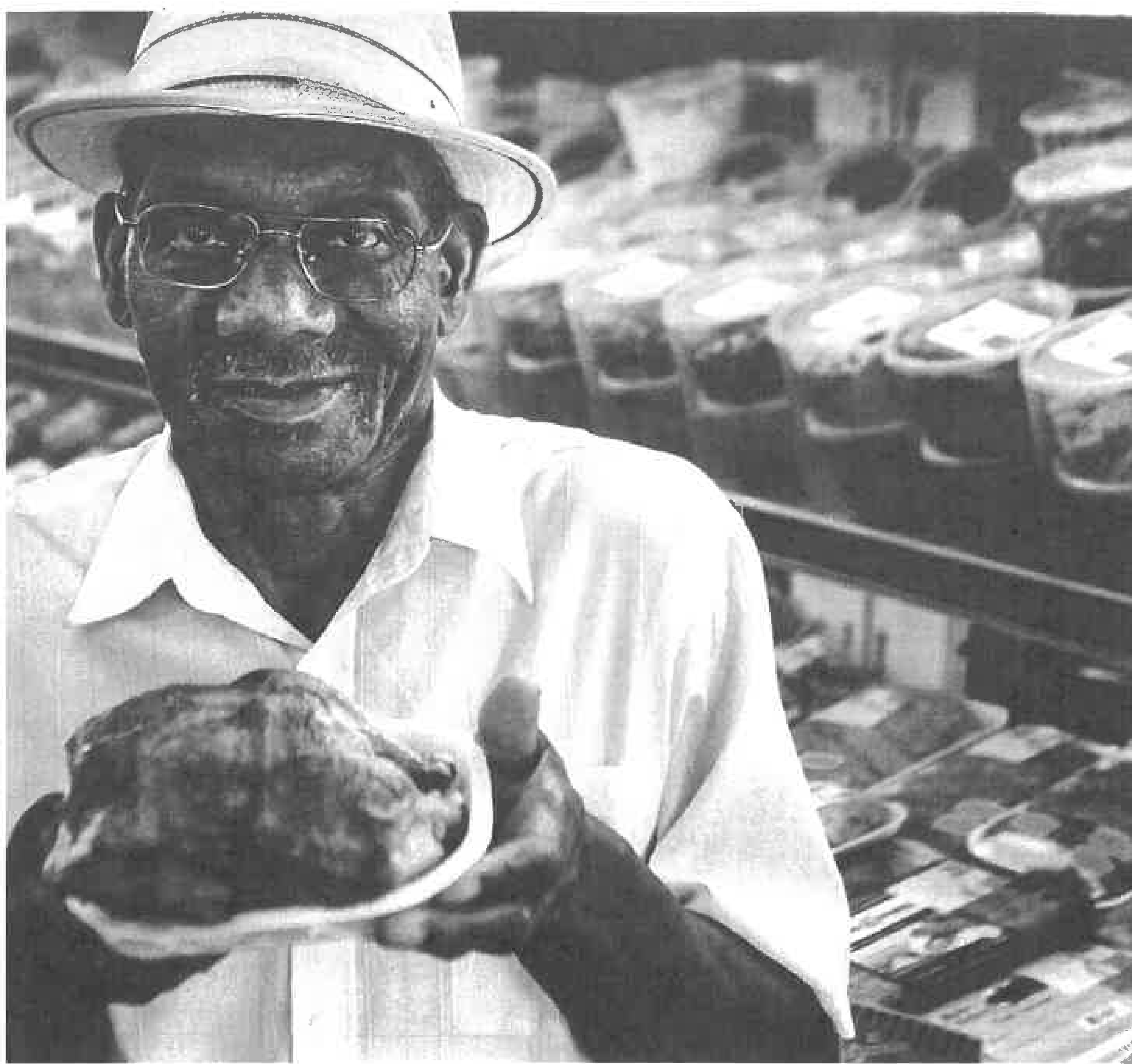
Longtime employee Susan Fisher works the front register at Lloyd's Market, which offers lots of locally grown produce, like that at right.



The boys started out with their stand by the sidewalk and by making brown bag deliveries to a few people in town.

Elton Hopkins is among the loyal customers who love the store's WondeRoast chicken.

> *"Old-timers and new folks both take time to stop in and share the gossip, yap about the tourists and moan about the heat."*



like it when people come in and talk to us about things that are happening in their lives."

That friendliness among employees is greatly appreciated by many customers. "Lloyd's is the heart of Lewes," says Jim Paslawski, co-owner of Honey's Farm Fresh restaurant a few doors down Savannah Road. "Old-timers and new folks both take time to stop in and share the gossip, yap about the tourists and moan about the heat. They have the place stocked with just about everything you need."

Another shopper echoes that last point. "It really is amazing how much Lloyd's can pack into such a small footprint, including over-the-counter pharmacy stuff," says Jean Whiddon, who appreciates having a market in town and avoiding trips out to Route 1.

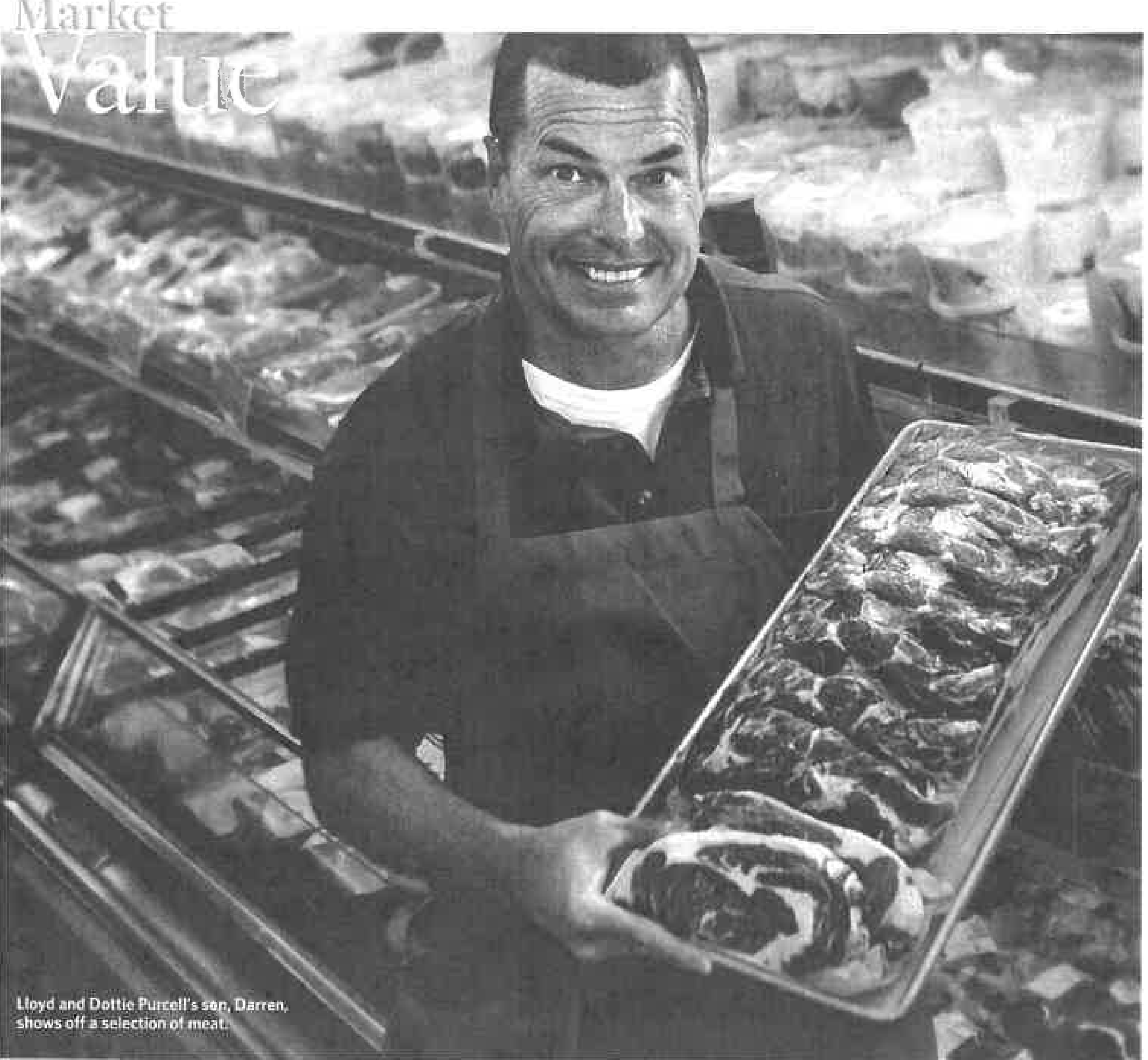
While meeting these everyday needs is a priority at Lloyd's, the staff is quick to respond to requests for new items, including many suited to more epicurean tastes.

"One thing I've seen is people having a lot more knowledge about organic stuff," Darren says. "They're also asking for premium products, like Angus steaks, and rotisserie turkeys and specially cut hams and rib roasts for the holidays. If a customer asks for something, we'll get it in. Sometimes it becomes a best-seller."

Although Darren and his family believe customer loyalty is rooted in the market's products and service, people around town also cite the store's long-rooted place in the cultural life of Lewes. In a note written to Lloyd in April 1998, local historian Hazel Brittingham reminisced about spending time as a child in the store when it was owned by the Prettyman family during the 1930s:

"I recall the small lunch room off to the right,

Market Value



Lloyd and Dottie Purcell's son, Darren, shows off a selection of meat.

where your meat department is now. I also recall a lovely bar-type structure all across the back with a counter and stools. Mrs. Prettyman would let us children play there if Mr. Prettyman wasn't in the store."

The store predates even those recollections. It was built by Glenwood Harrington in 1929 and sold to Jacob Prettyman in the early '30s. In 1946 the Prettymans sold the market to Frank Robinson, who operated it for more than two decades before he sold it to the Purcells. In a December 2000 *Cape Gazette* story by Dennis Forney, Robinson remembered that "in the early years we made sandwiches every day for the school kids because they didn't have a cafeteria at the time. For 10 cents they'd get a sesame seed roll with a piece of baloney and cheese and mustard, and for another nickel they'd get a soda."

Lloyd, who graduated from Lewes High School, where he dated Dottie, worked at Tom Best's hardware store and the A&P before going to work for Robinson in 1963. When the owner decided to retire, he asked his employee if he would like to buy the store. Lloyd didn't have enough money, but Frank said he would take payments and directed him to a grocery wholesaler who would finance the purchase.

Though many longtime customers believe the tireless proprietor deserves more down time, Lloyd still works in the store almost every day. On the Friday before this year's Fourth of July celebrations, he was joined by 19 employees. All were busy preparing for what Lloyd referred to as "the granddaddy of all weekends" as he loaded the cooler with three times the usual amount of fresh crabmeat and apologized for not having more time to chat about the store's history.

In the early years we made sandwiches for the school kids. For 10 cents they'd get a sesame seed roll with a piece of baloney and cheese and mustard.

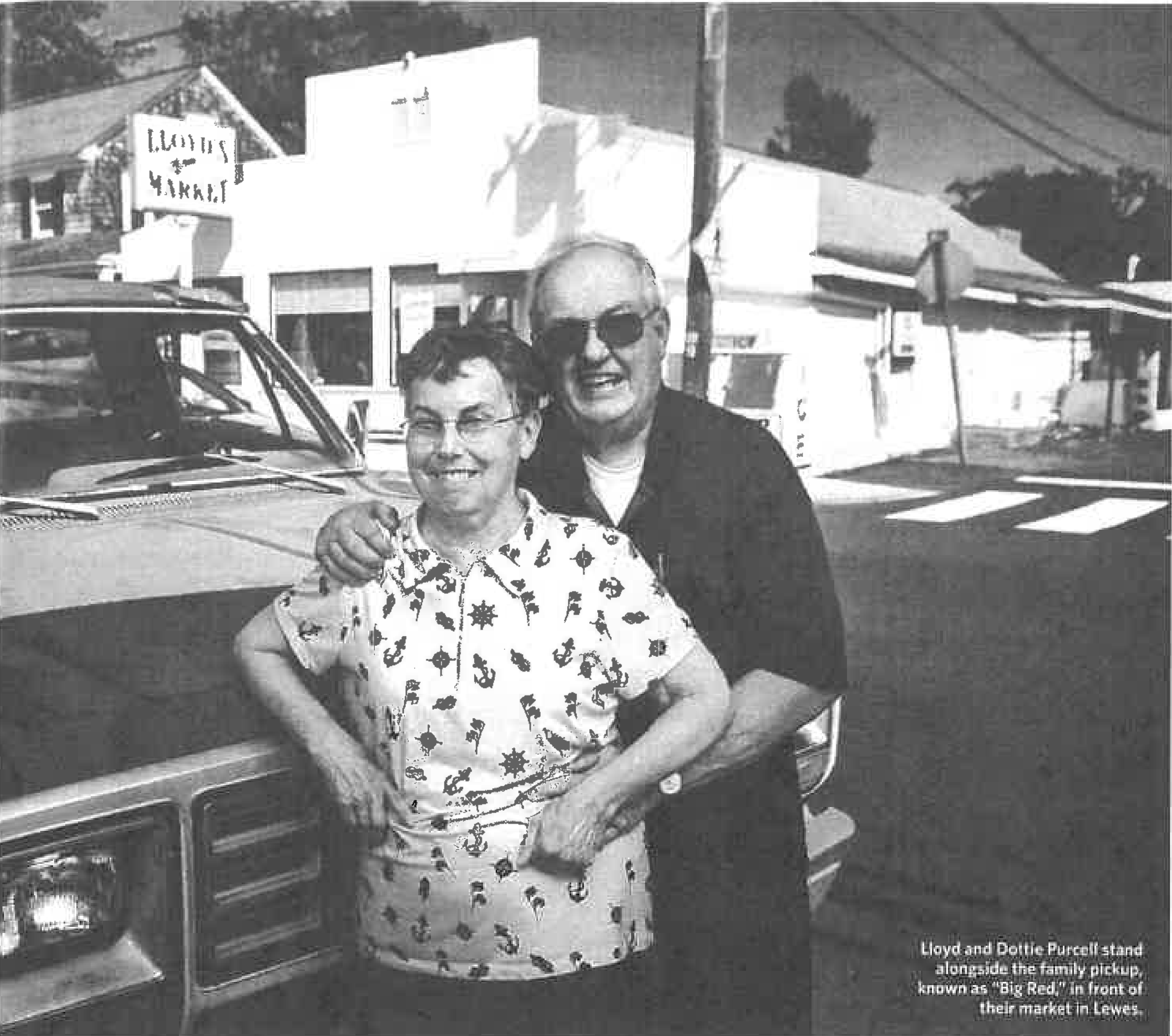
FALL
in love

Every season (and experience) is one to remember at the Boardwalk Plaza Hotel. We're open 52 weeks a year—and so is our Victoria's Restaurant. Call (800) 33 BEACH or (302) 227-7169 or visit www.boardwalkplaza.com for great package pricing.

BOARDWALK PLAZA HOTEL

2 Olive Avenue & the Boardwalk, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971

"Lloyd's will still be the first place they go because they'll always know where they started and will always return the kindness that's been shown to them."



Lloyd and Dottie Purcell stand alongside the family pickup, known as "Big Red," in front of their market in Lewes.

"We started prepping for this weeks ago," Darren said later that day in the tiny office, situated within the stock room. "Everyone will be here all weekend and then afterwards we'll spend a lot of time making records of what sold and what we could have done better for next year. Tomorrow and Sunday you'll see a line of people 10 feet long, but they always seem nicer and more relaxed than they'd probably be out on the highway. We're all here to do whatever we can to make them happy while taking care of our dad and mom too."

Darren's appreciation for intergenerational connections is shared by the Wilkinsons, who enjoy spending time with older Lewes residents because they always know they'll hear interesting stories about the area's history. For Melanie, these conversations are especially important in helping her boys understand the values of small-town life.

"It's not like you can just set up a stage and have role models for your kids. You need to find them where they are," she says. "We found them at Lloyd's, and through the people whose lives are touched by having the market right here in town. Five years down the road when [the boys] are growing and selling more, Lloyd's will still be the first place they go because they'll always know where they started and will always return the kindness that's been shown to them. In that way, the door to Lloyd's really has become a door to their future."

Chris Beakey, *of Lewes, is the author of "Fatal Option," to be published by Post Hill Press and distributed by Simon & Schuster in February 2017.*

Growing Up in Old Rehoboth

Money was scarce, times were tough, but Dick and Anne Lynam savor memories of their — and the town's — formative years

By Chris Beakey

Like many people who visit or live in coastal Delaware, Dick and Anne Lynam appreciate the area's modern amenities. Yet the longtime Rehoboth residents are happy to share memories of earlier days, when tourist accommodations were likely to be rooming houses adjacent to unpaved roads, and when most residents worked long hours to afford the necessities of daily life.

One symbol of that hard work endures today in the royal blue Lynam's Beach Service umbrellas and chairs that are rented from tidy sheds adjacent to the Rehoboth boardwalk. The business was founded by Dick's family before World War II, one of many enterprises he and Anne each became part of when their respective families moved to the area in the 1930s.

By Depression-era standards, life in those years was good for both the Lynams and the Toppins, who rented out rooms in their homes primarily to people who came to the area in search of work. Anne remembers her mother, nicknamed "Charlie," packing lunches for boarders who were building the Indian River Inlet Bridge. Dick remembers his father, Highland, cutting meat at Lingo's Store at Baltimore Avenue and First Street in between his property-management chores.

"Those years . . . you couldn't just have one job; you took whatever was available to you," Dick recalls. "My father had lost his [previous] job. They needed money to live on and to send my sister to college, so we moved into a house called The Marlyn at Baltimore Avenue and the boardwalk and rented rooms for 25 years."

Both Dick and Anne recount other aspects of life in their small seaside town.

"I started first grade at a new school. ... The golf course was behind our house, so I'd walk down the cart path," Anne notes. "One time, coming home from school I was with Danny Travis, another boy in my class, and we were going to catch tadpoles in the lake. I got too close and fell in — up to my neck in mud and almost over my head. ... My sister was a senior in high school so they called her. She had to take me home, mud and all."

Newly married Dick and Anne Lynam stake their space in the sand on a sunny morning in 1953.

Photograph courtesy of Dick and Anne Lynam

Such hazardous commutes weren't particularly unusual given Rehoboth's state of development at that time. As

Editor's note: This Look Back was drawn in part from an interview conducted by Violet Chilcoat for the Rehoboth Beach Historical Society's oral history project.

Dick says, "There were no paved roads outside of Rehoboth Avenue and First Street and maybe Columbia Avenue. But all the other streets were dirt roads. ... They had scrapers and they'd scrape them now and then, and then another truck would distribute some kind of a liquid salt to keep the dust down. Same way with Dewey Beach."

The home front

Amid these limitations, Dick is grateful for one special opportunity his family came to realize in the emerging resort town: "One of my sisters wanted me to start the [beach] business, and she was willing to buy us some umbrellas. I was too young at the time ... so my brother, Thornton, started it. But World War II came along and my brother went in the service so I took it over."

The boys' father managed the business when Dick later entered the military, and ably maintained it through uncertain times. Like all Atlantic coast residents, the Lynams and Toppins complied with World War II "blackout" regulations that required darkened windows after nightfall, although Anne remembers "a gentleman who rented one single room on the third floor. They used to say he would put his blind up and down. They thought he was signaling ships at sea."

While the couple still speculate on the veracity of that particular story, they have vivid memories of other signs the nation was at war.

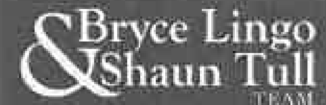
"They had a prisoner camp in Harrington, at the fairgrounds," Anne recalls, referring to a time during her elementary-school years when she lived in that Kent County town while her father worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

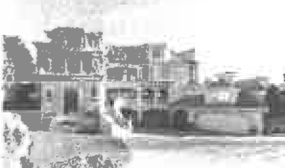
"They brought them down to clean the beach because they didn't have beach cleaners at the time," Dick adds. "We would see them ... nice-looking people, soldiers like we were. They did a lot of public work around that time."

Even so, security and suspicions remained a part of life.

"We had a German baker in [Harrington] who was confined to town," Anne says, "They wouldn't allow him out of town during the war."

Both Lynams also described the frequent sight of tar on the beach, which they believed to be a sign of ships that had been sunk offshore. >

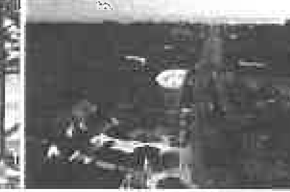




OCEANFRONT MASTERPIECE
Situated on arguably the best oceanfront lot in DE! Home features amazing ocean views, gourmet kitchen & more! $5,750,000

THE ULTIMATE OCEANFRONT HOME
Enjoy panoramic ocean views from every corner & gorgeous sunrises & sunsets from the Bell Tower. $5,600,000

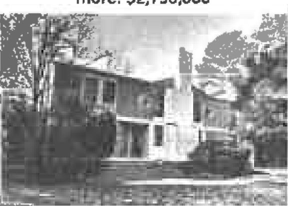
BEAUTIFUL OCEAN VIEWS
Just two doors from the ocean this home features 4BR, 3.5BA, rooftop deck, elevator, open living area, 11ft. ceilings & more! $4,150,000



BEST LOCATION IN HENLOPEN ACRES
This spacious & charming home is only steps from the beach. Home features 6BR, 5BA, vaulted ceilings & more! $2,750,000

BEAUTIFUL SILVER LAKE VIEWS
New construction with gorgeous Silver Lake views features 5BR, 5.5BA, 1st & 2nd floor master, gourmet kitchen & more! $2,495,000

COMMERCIAL | REHOBOTH AVE.
Commercial opportunity! Three parcels totaling 15,000 SF with two buildings and one vacant lot. Businesses not for sale. $2,450,000



CANAL FRONT | NORTH SHORES
This modern masterpiece features 5BR, 4BA, soaring ceilings, open floor plan, hardwood floors, custom built-ins & more! $2,400,000

NEWLY RENOVATED | THE PINES
Only 2 blocks to the beach in The Pines! This spacious home features wide plank hardwood floors, open floor plan& more! $2,250,000

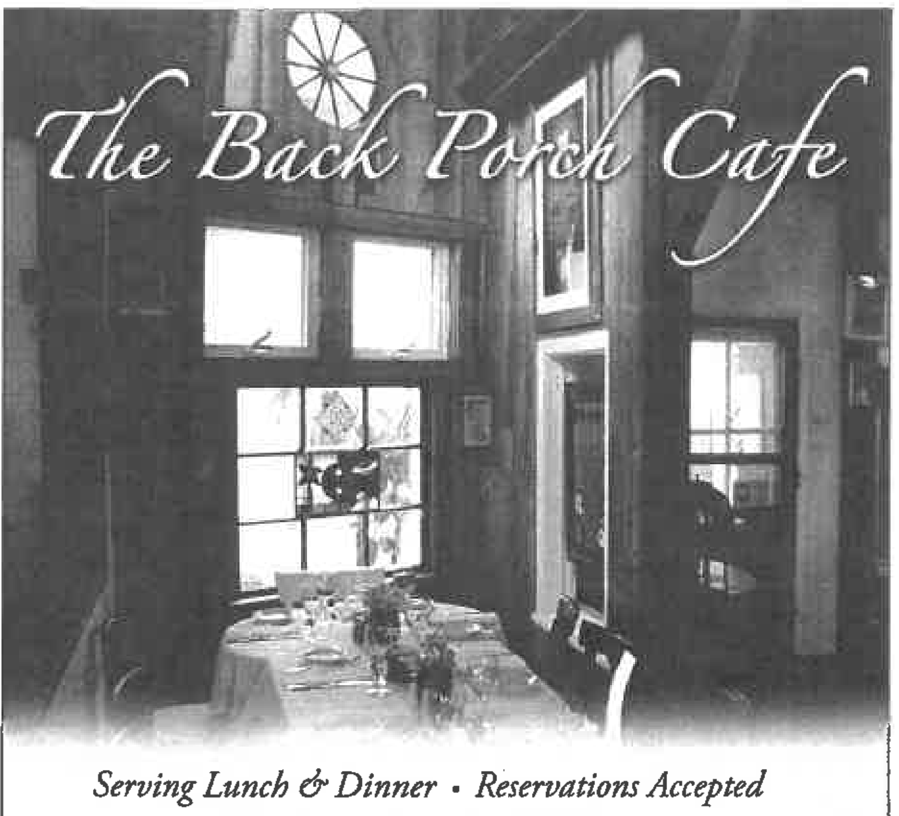
OCEAN VIEWS & GREAT LOCATION!
Grand home features 5BR, 4.5BA, inverted floor plan providing gorgeous ocean views, gourmet kitchen & much more! $2,795,000

CANAL FRONT | THE PINES
This home is situated on a beautiful bend of the Lewes Rehoboth Canal and features 5BR, 3.5BA, 2,500 sq. ft., swimming pool & more! $1,895,000

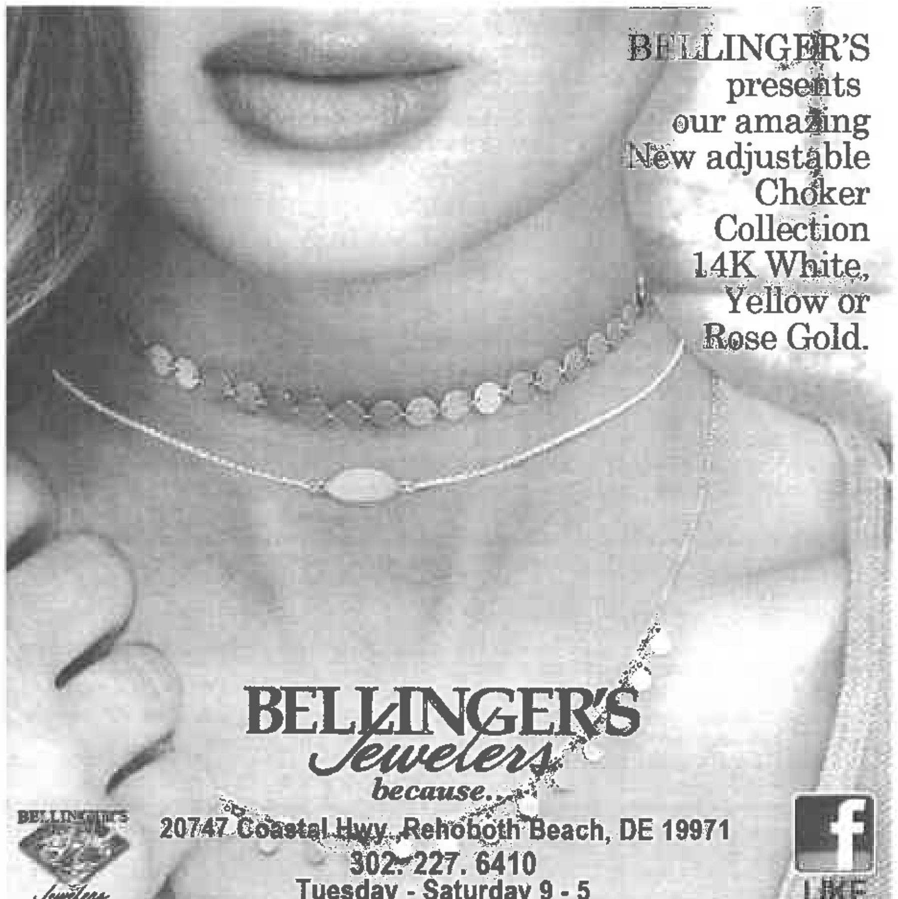
ONLY ONE BLOCK TO THE BEACH!
Just steps from Rehoboth's white sandy beaches this charming cottage features 5BR, 3.5BA, original knotty pine floors & more! $1,695,000

OCEAN BLOCK | DEWEY BEACH
Enjoy ocean views from this new construction home featuring 5BR, 4.5BA, large gourmet kitchen, & much more! $1,585,000

246 REHOBOTH AVENUE
REHOBOTH BEACH, DE 19971
RBRE.COM
302-226-6417 (direct)
302-227-3883 (main)



Serving Lunch & Dinner • Reservations Accepted
302.227.3674 | BackPorchCafe.com
59 Rehoboth Ave, Rehoboth Beach, DE



In the summer of 1954, Dick Lynam folds up beach chairs that his fledgling rental service provided to vacationers.

"Everybody had a can of kerosene or something at your doorstep, and when you got off the beach you had to clean your feet because they had tar all over them."

After the war, Dick's family faced other challenges, including the arrival in 1950 of Jay Dennis, a businessman from Florida who offered the town of Rehoboth a substantial sum for the right to rent his umbrellas on the beach. Dick looks back on this as an especially troubling development for area entrepreneurs "who had been doing this for years" and who "were sort of left out." Out of necessity, he and four other industrious young men banded together to create their own enterprise, United Beach Service.

"Every place Jay Dennis had a stand, we would have a stand. And when people came down the steps from the boardwalk we would approach them and do our best to convince them to rent from us.

"It was cutthroat at that point," he admits, but "since most of us had a vested interest in it, we probably got the best of Dennis' employees because we were interested in making money. As the years went by, Jay Dennis's slowly faded out."

The five entrepreneurs also disbanded a few years on. "Little by little ... they went to college, became lawyers and had other interests," Dick notes. Happily left behind were Dick and his cousin, Dick Catts, who died in 2014 after years of renting his own branded umbrellas through Catts Beach Service, a business that likewise continues to this day.

Storm of the century

Like many Rehoboth residents with deep roots in the area, the Lynams also have clear memories of the March storm of 1962, which marked an especially difficult time for Dick.

"I was teaching school in Millsboro. ... We woke up and saw some damage to the boardwalk. Anne and I were building some apartments at the time so I went to check on the progress of the building. I noticed some workers were down there on the boardwalk. … By nighttime it was gone — the boardwalk was demolished."

Fortunately, thanks to the stage of construction at that point, the apartment building survived: "We didn't have windows in, so the wind just blew through. We had … no damage whatsoever."

Unfortunately, he had to make a very difficult phone call about his childhood home, which had survived many storms before.

"I called my mother up ... and I said, 'Mother, the Marlyn's gone.'"

Dick lists a few of the many other buildings and businesses that likewise were assaulted by the storm: The Pink Pony, Stuart Kingston Gallery, and the front sections of the grand Belhaven Hotel and Dolle's, two beloved oceanfront institutions.

Anne's memories of the destruction are equally vivid: "The Grier home was a huge two-story. ... I heard the crack and watched it go into the sea. It was just unbelievable the way it slowly went down like a ship. It was eerie."

Shortly after that moment, the Lynams fled their home with their three children (at the time), including 2-month-old Robert. As Anne recalls: "When we looked out and saw the water rushing down the road, we put all our clothes on the sheet of the bed and rolled it up and went like Santa Claus out the door."

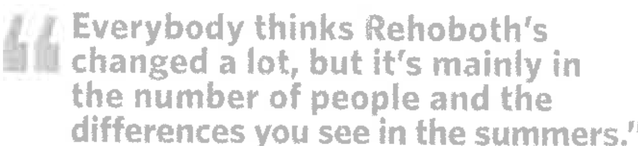
Dick Lynam's childhood home, on the Rehoboth boardwalk at Baltimore Avenue, was nicknamed "The Marlyn." It was destroyed in the infamous Storm of 1962.

Love in bloom

Today, both Lynams exude calm and a sense of accomplishment as they recount the ups and downs of the past. Hard times are described with humor, and good times with gratitude, particularly when they speak about their courtship, which began at Snyder's on Rehoboth Avenue. The store — a long-ago precursor of the present-day Snyder's Candy — was a favorite hangout for locals at the time, with a soda fountain, jukebox and an array of newspapers and magazines for sale.

"I had just graduated from high school, and a girlfriend of mine [and I] … drove up and parked in front of Snyder's, like everybody did, and these two boys came over and started talking to us," Anne says.

One of those two was Dick, and what happened afterward is still a source of amusement for the couple. There was an early misstep from the boys, who talked about meeting up with the girls at a



"beach party" the following day. That led Anne and her girlfriend to do some investigative work and learn that the party story was made up, part of a ploy to get them on an actual date. And that convinced the girls to "forget these boys!" and spend the evening with family at The Dinner Bell restaurant instead — only to arrive home and find Dick and his friend tossing a ball in their front yard.

Afterward, Anne says, "I didn't see him for a while. He didn't like that very much."

Fortunately, amends were made and their budding attraction flourished. As with many young people at the time, the courtship included strolls on the boardwalk, where everyone dressed up to look their best: Anne in skirts and Dick in long pants and dress shirts ironed by his mother.

Both worked summer jobs during the day, as did many locals, all of whom had one thing in common, Anne notes: "We didn't get real tan."

After getting married in 1953, the couple raised five children, spending most of their lives in Rehoboth except for one short stint in Dewey. They cherish those early days, and are happy the town has protected much of its historical aspects while evolving to meet the needs of modern-day residents and visitors.

"Everybody thinks Rehoboth's changed a lot, but it's mainly in the number of people and the differences you see in the summers," Anne says. "I'm looking across the lake now and I remember a lot of the old houses. If you look beyond the [facades on] Rehoboth Avenue you can still see the old structures are there ... even the old Carlton Hotel."

One thing that has changed is the summertime vibe of strolls along the boardwalk.

"We went down last night and had dinner on the boardwalk, and then we decided we'd walk back and get an ice cream cone at The Royal Treat," Anne notes. "The people looked so different from when we were growing up. They weren't dressed. They were so casual."

That fact of contemporary life in no way diminishes the couples' affection for the region, although they acknowledge that even after nearly nine decades in the area, true locals probably wouldn't call them natives.

"You have to be born here," Anne says.

Still, "it's been a wonderful experience to have lived in Rehoboth," she adds in testament to their years of hard work, the strong relationships forged along the way, and the many rewards reaped from contributing to a community they love. ■

CHRIS BEAKEY, *a regular contributor to Delaware Beach Life, is the author of "Fatal Option," a thriller published in February by Simon & Schuster.*

Photographs courtesy of Dick and Anne Lynam

Bard's-Eye View

On stage and in the classroom, James Keegan brings Shakespeare's rich language and timeless insights to life

By Chris Beakey | Photograph by Carolyn Watson

Actor and educator James Keegan relaxes at Herring Point, one of many coastal settings that inspire his work.

James Keegan and his wife, Anne Colwell, live in a house set within deep woods off a country road near Milton. The leafy setting is a perfect complement to Keegan's calm, thoughtful demeanor as he discusses his life as an educator and Shakespearean actor.

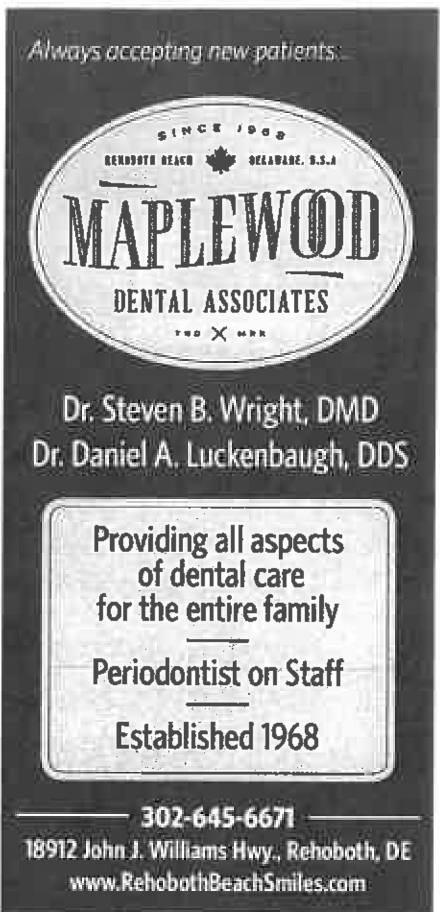
It is a deep well that he taps: The Bard's understanding of human tragedy and comedy remains vital four centuries after his death. Only last month the Lewes Public Library held its annual Shakespeare Festival, testament to the great playwright's enduring appeal. Perhaps more telling are the ubiquitous echoes of his themes found in contemporary entertainment.

"Shakespeare captured human emotion with such depth — that's why we're still performing his plays and seeing his themes playing out on the modern screen," Keegan says. "'Game of Thrones' has its muddy feet in 'Henry VI,' so I know George R.R. Martin [who wrote the novel on which the HBO series is based] was drawing from that. I've always thought the work of [J.R.R.] Tolkien has a lot of Shakespearean tendencies as well."

Two other popular programs Keegan cites are "Fargo" ("although that's more about the way it feels, since it doesn't have the poetry") and the Netflix series "House of Cards," largely because of the resume and performance of its leading man.

"Kevin Spacey has played Richard III; he knows what it's like to be a stage actor," Keegan

JAMES KEEGAN INTERPRETS PROSPERO
Go to www.Reveel.it and snap a photo



Next Exhibition:

"Face to Face to Face"

October 7-28

(Opening Reception Oct. 7 - 5-7 p.m.)

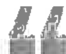
Featuring Sydney McGinley, Michael Sprouse and Karin Snoots

520 E. Savannah Rd.
Lewes DE 19958
302-645-0551
www.peninsula-gallery.com

explains. "He might be alone during a soliloquy, but he knows the audience is watching him, and is with him in that theatrical moment."

Spacey's performance as President Frank Underwood also mirrors historical perceptions of King Richard III, Keegan notes, because both characters inspire simultaneous revulsion and fascination. This is especially apparent, in Spacey's case, when the story's action freezes and the character turns to the camera to address viewers.

"He's basically saying, 'I know you like me even though I'm doing terrible things,'" Keegan says.



I've had people who've seen me in a performance tell me, 'At the beginning I didn't understand what you were saying, but then when you started talking normally, I got it.'"

Performing and teaching

Keegan shares these types of insights often in his work as an associate professor of English and theater at the University of Delaware's Georgetown campus. He also draws significantly on his experiences as an actor in more than 45 productions with the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Va., where he's played the title roles in "King Lear" and "Titus Andronicus," and Prospero in "The Tempest."

Keegan has also performed at Washington, D.C.'s Folger Theatre, and his poems, essays and fiction have appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, the *Delmarva Review*, and *Delaware Beach Life*, among other publications.

That illustrious body of work followed a childhood as the son of an Irish-American bar owner in Queens, N.Y., a few years in corporate America, and the earning of a PhD from the University in Delaware, where he's taught since 1996.

These wide-ranging experiences are especially useful as a teacher, he says, because of the diverse backgrounds of his students:

"I teach gifted high school students who are taking college courses as well as those struggling with learning challenges, and many in between. They all bring their own perspectives to their studies. Some have grown up on farms in the area. Some are the children of immigrants. Some are returning to college as adults. When you teach poetry classes and they come in and tell you they don't like poetry, you have to view that as an opportunity ... because often they come to change their minds."

Keegan describes how similar transformations have occurred among people who initially told him they didn't understand Shakespeare, and wished the language of his plays could be simplified to sound like modern spoken English.

"There's certainly a movement to change the language, but I'd hate to lose the poetry," he says. Keegan also doesn't believe the change is needed to foster true understanding of the works. "I've had people who've seen me in a performance tell me, 'At the beginning I didn't understand what you were saying, but then when you started talking normally, I got it.'"

Except that "talking normally" never actually happened, he notes with a smile. What *does* happen, if people watch and listen to a Shakespeare play long enough, is a gradual acclimation to the Elizabethan English.

"In the tragedy that bears his name, Hamlet instructs actors visiting his castle to 'marry the action to the word,'" Keegan says. "That's because as audience members we are affected much more by what we see than what we hear. As language-anxious people watch the performances, the portion of their brain that interprets action so well combines with their fundamental understanding of the language. The anxiety about that language falls away once they find themselves engrossed in the identifiable and moving humanity of the characters Shakespeare has created."

This type of understanding comes naturally to Keegan after decades of experience as a classical stage actor. Yet he also enjoys more conventional entertainment, and expresses little worry that the classics will be lost to a generation that seems obsessed with technology.

"Sometimes I feel inclined to despair of the [social-media-driven] culture, but

then I think of all of the good things that have happened with technology and entertainment," he says. "I've got a stack of hardcover books at my bedside, but I also love my Kindle. It's a great way to read backstage. I also love a good beach read as much as anyone, and can see how people can read great novels and watch 'The Jersey Shore' too."

'Dangerous' theater

Keegan and Colwell, who's also an associate professor of English at the University of Delaware, are especially gratified when people react on a visceral level to what they're reading or seeing on stage. Keegan experienced this recently while watching a performance of "The Return," by Hanna Eady and Edward Mast, at Washington's Mosaic Theater Company. (The drama featured his daughter-in-law, Alyssa Wilmoth Keegan who, like Keegan's son, Tom, is an actor in the nation's capital.) The play takes place in a struggling auto-repair shop and spotlights the conflict between a Palestinian mechanic and the Israeli Jewish woman from his past who is attracted to him.

"I was sitting in the audience, and it was so tense as I watched people across the aisle and saw how it was landing on them," Keegan recalls. "I thought, 'Oh, my God, this is a dangerous play.' After working in theater for so many years, I know there's definitely a following for these types of stories."

He experiences a similar thrill when audiences connect with his own performances. A notable example came during his 2006 portrayal of Iago, the backstabbing frenemy of Othello, at the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Va. The venue is a modern re-creation of Shakespeare's original indoor theater, seating just 300 people in-the-round — an intimate setting that often makes audiences feel as if they're part of the production.

"Iago has a soliloquy where he's devising to fool Othello and make him jealous," Keegan recalls. At one point, Iago poses a question to himself — "How am I then a villain/ To counsel Cassio to this parallel course/ Directly to his good?"

At which point, during one performance, a woman sitting very close to the stage called out, "You're just SO MEAN!"

In anticipation of this type of audience

FIVE STAR Quality Rated Center

Offering a SAFE and FUN Learning environment

BEFORE and AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS including school closings and in-service days

Participates in CACFP (Child Adult Care Food Program) providing daily breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack

Purchase of Care (POC) accepted

Locations in REHOBOTH, LEWES AND TOWNSEND

LEWES **302-644-1585** / REHOBOTH **302-645-5010** / TOWNSEND **302-378-4778**

www.beachbabieschildcare.com

covers it all!

Cooling Heating Plumbing Electrical

302-581-9797 www.megeeco.com
24 HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICE

Remarkable home design begins with beautiful lighting...

HINKLEY
LIGHTING

lighting-paddle fans-lamps-art-home decor

Denney Lighting & Design

Rt 113 Millsboro, DE 302.934.8885
Open M-F 9-5 Sat 9-3
www.denneylightingdesign.com

reaction, Shakespeare had a ready-made response — "Divinity of Hell!" — written into the soliloquy. With perfect timing, Keegan delivered that line directly to the woman as if she were also part of the play, which enhanced the immersive experience for everyone else as well.

A setting that fosters insight and inspiration

While these types of experiences happen most often in Keegan's theater work outside of Delaware, he appreciates his longtime roots in the area, where he's lived since 1983 except for a few years as a corporate communications specialist in New Jersey.

"There's something about being on the lip of the ocean — being able to walk up to that point at Cape Henlopen and being out on the sand in that transitional space — that's powerful to me."

Similar feelings about the inspirational connection between the ocean and sky and life are woven into Keegan's own writings, which include an essay in the May 2015 issue of *Delaware Beach Life*. Titled "Heart and Soul on the Horizon," it offers soul-deep reflections fueled by his early-morning runs along or near the coast:

"As long as humankind has made songs and poems … we have noted the parallel between the passage of the sun across the sky and the passage of our lives. I think this may be why people more often seek out the sunrise in solitude while the sunset calls for congregation.

"We start our lives alone, but we learn along the way that our journey is a shared one. And so at the end of the day, we tend to gather together. There is comfort and there is joy in the sharing of the day's late burst of color in the company of friends or fellow travelers.

"The sunrise offers me a fresh shot, another beginning. The sunset sings to me the beautiful and terrible truth of the ephemeral: You will not last forever, but look at this. Look at this!"

An apt sentiment, one might say, for the actor and educator's lifetime of creative expression and dedication to changing perceptions, sharing insights, and ensuring that great works live on. ■

Chris Beakey, *a regular contributor to Delaware Beach Life, is the author of "Fatal Option," a thriller published by Simon & Schuster.*