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WILLIAMSBURG'S

Next Door Neighbors®

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PRICELESS

Discovering the people who call Williamsburg home

Our Diversions

Toby Papas



KLØSS
TOBY

TOBY PAPAS



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Passion & Purpose

By Narielle Living

People pursue hobbies for a variety of reasons, but generally because they are passionate about a particular subject. For some, however, passion intersects with purpose, and a hobby becomes a way to help others during times of disaster or need. Toby Papas, President of the Williamsburg Area Amateur Radio Club (WAARC), is doing just that with her ham radio.

According to Toby, ham radio has been

around for over 100 years. Back in the days before computers and cell phones, hams were on the cutting edge of technology. A lot of the first major advances in the radio art were made by ham radio operators and then the commercial industries would use that technology.

“A lot of people don’t think that ham radio is still a viable option,” she says. “However, it’s more popular than it has been in the past. There are over 760,000 licensed hams in the

United States and probably about a total of 2 million around the world. And, it’s something that you can do for free.”

Toby became interested in ham radio after she retired from her position in the military. Born in San Diego, California, Toby spent most of her childhood in Key West, Florida, a place she remembers with fondness. “When we lived there as children, it was not a tourist town, it was still very rural. The old railroad



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trestle was still there, and the kids loved to go there and catch fish and things like that. As my brother used to say to his college students, 'I grew up like Tom Sawyer.'"

After Toby went to college and returned to Key West, where her mother still lived, she had difficulty finding a teaching position. "I was working part time, and all of a sudden I met a recruiter in the post office. He said, you know they need female officers in the Army. I filled out the paperwork, and lo and behold, I was commissioned in the Army. My first assignment was in Anchorage, Alaska."

It was while she was in the Army that she met her husband, Dino, when she moved into the quarters next to him.

Dino had been involved in ham radio since he was in high school. "I've been a ham for over 50 years," he says. "I was a ham when we first met."

Toby's interest in ham radio didn't blossom until later. When she retired from the Army at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, she had more time to dedicate to this hobby. "I kind of tagged along to all the ham radio activities he went to," she says, referring to her husband. "For me, after I was finished with the Army, I had time for something else."

After living in a variety of places, including Hampton and York County, Toby and Dino moved to this area. "On the weekends, we'd come up to Williamsburg," she says. "It was such a lovely little college town, and we would walk around the old Colonial Williamsburg area."

The move happened after Toby's mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. "She came to live with us but the house in Yorktown was two story and wasn't really well adapted for a 90-year-old lady. So, my mom and I went down to the Chamberlin at Fort Monroe, and my dad was in independent living." At that point she decided to get a two-bedroom apartment. "I thought I'd be able to get her adapted, but she would never leave the apartment so that idea didn't work out." After a year and a half of care, Toby and Dino began to look in Williamsburg, eventually finding a suitable home.

As Toby became involved in the world of ham radio, she was pleased to discover that more women were participating. "It was kind of exciting, and it was a bit of camaraderie among the women." As more women joined the ranks of the radio club, they trained and tested and passed their tests together. "It's a very social club. As an example, every Saturday before COVID we would all meet for breakfast and every Wednesday we would meet for lunch." The pandemic has changed things but has not taken away the social aspect of the club. "During the Safe at Home phase, we conducted a daily get together on our local ham radio, and we call it the coffee and radio net. We stay connected and it's really turned into a great social networking kind of thing. And we've had over 180 different, unique people chime in to our coffee and radio net since late March, so it's kept us connected and it's kept us sane."

Toby had to take specific steps prior to becoming a ham radio operator, including passing a test and getting a license. "The Federal Communications Commission, the FCC, sort of enters into a contract with ham radio operators." The FCC allows ham radio operators to use the fre-

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quency spectrum, which is sought after by commercial enterprises, and they allow people to build their own radios with the caveat that they obtain a certain level of knowledge. In studying and passing an exam for a license, ham radio operators are then capable of assisting during emergency situations by augmenting a community's emergency communication system.

"The thing about ham radio is, it's really a hobby of self-accomplishment. It's the self-accomplishment of building your own radio, of being able to erect your own antenna and then talk locally and talk around the world. If you have a cell phone, you could dial someone in Kazakhstan. Dial a random number in Kazakhstan from your cell phone and see what you have in similar interest or language with that person. You're probably not going to have a lot of things in common." With the ham radio, however, an immediate connection is made, because the person on the other side of the world may not speak English very well, or at all, but hams can still communicate even across that

kind of language barrier. Also, both operators had to study for a license and work to put the radio system together.

One of the things Toby loves about her hobby is the level of community involvement. "We love to support community activities, and we support things like Pedal the Parkway [and] Hike for Hospice. We call upon our hams to volunteer with their radios, and there's stations around these different events."

The usefulness of having ham radio operators at community events cannot be overstated. With Pedal the Parkway, for example, if someone falls off their bike a ham calls the first aid station to give an initial report or request a relief car.

Toby Papas loves participating in all that the Williamsburg club has to offer, and she appreciates doing this with her husband. She is also proud of his accomplishments and notes one in particular that is an example of how they are involved in the community. "Dino was involved at the Berkeley Middle School a couple

of years ago," she says. "They wanted their sixth graders to be able to talk to an astronaut on the space station. Dino happened to have the antenna and the radio, and the other guys helped with putting it on the roof of the school. They prepared the sixth graders to ask the astronauts questions, and they hooked up the radio.

The lights started to glow, the radio was working, and these students had a chance to come up to the radio on the microphone and ask an astronaut a question and get an answer back. That's an example of the way we want to be integrated into our community. We want people to know that we're here to support you in many ways." NDN

Anyone with an interest in learning more about ham radio can check the American Radio Relay League (<http://www.arrl.org/getting-licensed>). There you can also find links to local ham radio clubs in your area (<http://www.arrl.org/clubs>). Additional info about the Williamsburg Amateur Radio Club can be found at k4rc.net.



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Catherine E. Sears
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Brandon, who earned a degree in biology from Ave Maria University in Florida, was looking for something to keep him busy during the winter months when he discovered fishkeeping.

"The more I looked into it, the more exciting it sounded," he says. "It is a popular hobby and a diverse hobby, just not as well known. I started watching a lot of videos and doing a lot of research to see how it all worked."

Brandon decided to start out maintaining an all-natural fresh water tank, using real plants, dirt and gravel and a natural biological filter with no chemical treatments.

"I did some research on which type of fish and plants go together and which don't," he says. "There are a lot of different fish that have a lot of different needs. I decided on keeping guppies. They are just really pretty fish. The males have a lot of really beautiful colors. They make a great display fish to have in the home."

Guppies, also sometimes known as million-fish or rainbowfish, are one of the most popular freshwater aquarium fish species. Brandon ordered his guppies from a fish breeder in

Florida. One of the fish turned out to be pregnant. Eventually, Brandon's school of fish grew into 60 fish, which are kept in three tanks: two 20-gallon tanks that are separately used for males and females and a five-gallon tank for the baby fish, referred to as fry. Brandon also has two small catfish, called *Otocinclus* catfish, as well as two snails.

Brandon changes some of the tank water once a week, avoiding soap or detergents that will harm the fish. Otherwise, he just lets them be.

"Fish are sensitive," Brandon says. "You want to keep everything clean, but you don't want to overclean so you don't shock them." For a fish, shock can be a life-threatening condition.

Brandon's favorite part about fishkeeping is simply admiring them as they do their thing. "In the morning, I'll have my cup of coffee and watch the fish," Brandon says. "It's very relaxing to me. There is so much about fish we don't really know. Their habits, their behaviors, their environments, how they breed. It's all so fascinating to me."

Guppies, which only grow to be a couple of

inches in size, typically live up to three years. Brandon, his wife, and their son named the first few fish, but then there came to be too many that joined the fold.

"We named our biggest fish Goliath," he says. "There is one named Blaze and one named Ember because their colors look like fire. We named one Rocket because with its blue and red colors it looks like a rocket taking off. We named another one Hope because she almost died but we were able to save her."

Brandon's two-year-old son, Ben, is equally enthralled by all the fish.

"I love fishkeeping because I love the process of keeping the ecosystem," Brandon says. "There is another part of it called aquascaping, which is designing the tanks. You design the tanks the way you want them to look. I love watching the fish in the tank. Ben also loves to look at the fish. It is a great hobby to have because the fish are a great addition for a family."

Brandon and his wife, Heather, met at Ave Maria University. After graduating, Brandon moved on to chiropractic school at the Palmer College of Chiropractic, also in Florida. His

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specialty is in upper cervical chiropractic, which focuses on the top two bones in the neck.

Brandon pursued upper cervical chiropractic in part to help his wife, who at the time had been suffering from debilitating migraine headaches. "It was awful and really scary," Brandon says.

The couple exhausted every option to find a cure for Heather's migraines, then one of Brandon's professors, who specialized in upper cervical chiropractic, treated Heather and helped reduce her pain.

"Upper cervical chiropractic changed our way of life," Brandon says. "I knew then that it was also something that I wanted to do to help others."

Brandon went on to further study at the Clinical Neuroscience Institute and joined the Grostic Procedure Society. The Grostic Procedure relates to the care of the upper cervical spine. Today, Brandon is president of the Grostic Procedure Society.

Four years ago, Brandon and Heather were looking for a place to raise a family and decided

on Williamsburg, where Brandon once lived for a few years when he was a teenager.

"Williamsburg has a great balance of weather, culture, and family-friendly activities," Brandon says. "We both just fell in love with it. Everything about it is great. The community has really embraced us. I love having taken root here."

In 2018, Brandon opened his chiropractic practice, Via Vitae Chiropractic, on John Tyler Highway. Shortly after, their son, Ben, was born. Heather serves as the office manager, while Ben steals the show with his regular appearances in the office.

Brandon treats patients ranging in age from two weeks old to 98 who suffer from various conditions from neck pain to migraines to Meniere's Disease, a rare disorder of the inner ear that causes bouts of vertigo.

"There is no problem too big or too small," Brandon says. "We want to help you function to the best of your ability, whatever that may be. There are options out there to help you."

Brandon values the relationships he's been able to develop with his patients in the three

years he's been in business so far.

"Our patients are like our family," Brandon says. "Having those relationships is important for healing. The name of our practice, Via Vitae, means 'Way of Life' in Latin. We want to bring that way of life to our patients. It's a blessing to be a part of our patients' lives and to be able to help them."

Eventually, Brandon would like to hire new chiropractors and expand Via Vitae Chiropractic, opening more offices in the area. Brandon Babin would also like to incorporate his fishkeeping hobby into the business by adding fish tanks to the office.

Dr. Brandon Babin recognizes that fishkeeping, like any hobby, is a choice when deciding how involved he wants to be and how many fish he can raise. "You can go into fishkeeping as light or as deep as you want," he says. "It may seem intimidating and you'll make mistakes, but the most important thing to remember is to have fun. Eventually, I want to get a saltwater tank. I think saltwater fish are absolutely gorgeous. That is definitely my next step in the hobby." NDN

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Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Spreading cheer with Painted Rocks

By Lillian Stevens

The concept is simple: spread joy and happiness. The vehicle is a painted rock.

Almost four years ago, Barbara Burris launched Williamsburg VA ROCKS! She hoped the group's efforts to paint rocks and hide them in the community would bring smiles to her neighbors. Barbara has not been disappointed.

"It has been an amazing adventure," she says.

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"I thought it was a really cool concept, and so easy to do. Whatever someone may be struggling through, finding one of these rocks can really brighten their day."

The inspiration came from a visit with one of Barbara's grandsons, then living in Oahu, Hawaii. "We were together when we found that first rock, and it said 'Live Aloha' which is perfect. Aloha means breath of light; living aloha is to share kindness, caring, peace, all of those things."

Barbara says her grandson was so excited to find two rocks, and she knew she was on to something. "I had to do my research first, though," she says. "I learned that if you want to start a rock group in your town, you must check first to make sure there isn't one already."

That was in April 2017. Barbara's research revealed no such group existed in Williamsburg. That was something she quickly changed.

"We started with a Facebook presence, four people and a few rocks," she says. "And it's funny because for a few months, there wasn't much response but today we have over 6,200

members. It's been way more than I could have imagined."

Loosely based on the Kindness Rocks project that originated in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, rocks are painted and shared outdoors in a variety of places in and around town.

"Megan Murphy started Kindness Rocks by putting out one rock with the simple message: 'you've got this'," Barbara says. "A friend of hers found the rock on the beach, and the rest is history."

Designs are as diverse as the artists who create them. Whether inspired by the sea, a favorite band, the season or just a vibrant color or message, anything goes. Here in Williamsburg, typical hiding spots include the Historic Area, New Town and local parks. Some rocks have traveled cross country and even internationally.

"If you find a rock, you can either leave it intact, move it to a new location, or just keep the rock," she says. "Whatever you do, we hope you'll take a picture of your rock and share it on our Williamsburg VA ROCKS! Facebook page."

Painting the rocks doesn't require a lot of skill or talent, although some folks certainly bring both to the table.

"Some prefer to write messages or decorate their rocks with stickers, while other make elaborate art with their rocks," Barbara says. "Some paint animals on their rocks, others paint nautical scenes or something significant to them. One of my favorite rocks was painted by my three-year-old grandson. It runs the gamut and they're all precious."

"It melts your heart to see some of the posts from people who have found our rocks. Someone might say they were having the worst day or that they just had a cancer treatment when they found their rock."

Rock artists typically include some identifiers on the bottom of the rock, perhaps their initials and the year. If they are with a particular rock group, that might be included as well.

One word of caution: never take a rock from personal property or leave one in a federal park. "Some people have started leaving rocks along the Colonial Parkway, and that's not allowed."

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If you leave rocks there, the park rangers will take them up.”

Barbara marvels at the many wonderful people she’s met over the span of these few short years.

From rock fundraisers to benefit the Heritage Humane Society, one of which, unfortunately, was canceled this year due to the pandemic, to rock painting events, she and her group have also collaborated with local studios like Artfully Yours Studio and Sentiments by Shannon, as well as the Community Kindness Project, Williamsburg Police and James City County Police. There’s a rock garden at WISC, and a rock pot at the James City County Recreation Center.

“The idea to open a rock garden at the Williamsburg Indoor Sports Complex came from Dr. Matthew Eppright, an orthodontist with Williamsburg Orthodontist,” she says. “He was painting a giraffe on a rock with his young daughter at an event we hosted when he realized that this was something he wanted to be

involved with.”

The rock garden was built by Coleman Nursery and “planted” with several dozen decorated rocks.

“The idea is to raise awareness,” Barbara says. “because a lot of people don’t know about the rock sharing and how it works.”

She has always loved art and has dabbled at it over the years. But she says anybody can have fun with their unique creations.

“We’re all artists! And it doesn’t cost much. It’s truly a win-win situation. I just hope people find joy and love in this because that’s what it’s really about. The really cool thing is I probably painted and hid 300 rocks before I found my first rock.”

Barbara sources most of her rocks at Luck Stone, but emerging rock artists can find pebble stones at Home Depot or just about any garden center. In terms of supplies, the paints themselves are very inexpensive and can be found at Walmart, craft shops like Michael’s, or on Amazon.

“You’ll want to use an acrylic paint,” she says. “Then use an acrylic sealer to make your creation weatherproof.”

For Barbara, the takeaway has been the wonderful people she’s met.

“You never know what someone’s journey is or how a neighbor’s day is going,” she says. “I love to see the happy faces, whether they are children or adults. So many of them will post on our Facebook group page that they found their rock at a time when they really needed it.” Barbara has lived all over the world, so that makes this endeavor all the more meaningful for her.

“I have taken rocks to Brazil and Spain,” she says. “They’ve really traveled all over, so that’s amazing.”

The native of Macon, Georgia was educated at the University of Georgia and later married a man she affectionately calls a “military brat.” “My husband, Doug, grew up in a military family and then he, in turn joined the U.S. Army where he served as an engineer for 23



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years. His career has taken us all over the United States and the world."

The couple has three children and eight grandchildren. Before landing in Williamsburg, they lived in Yorktown.

"Yorktown was the last place Doug was active duty," Barbara says. "When he retired from the Army, he continued his work as a civilian." Ultimately, the couple designed and built their home on 26 acres in Williamsburg.

"We love it so much here," she says. "Williamsburg is such a cozy, friendly place."

Like their parents, Barbara and Doug's children have lived all over the United States too, one as far away as Korea.

"After having them all over the country, it's nice that they are a little closer."

Their oldest son lives in Apex, North Carolina with his wife and their three-year-old son. One of their daughters lives in Utah with her husband and their six children. Their youngest, her husband and their three-year-old son also live in North Carolina.

Not surprisingly, all of the grandchildren enjoy painting rocks.

Even though the rocks are intended to be whimsical little ambassadors of happiness, sometimes a rock can hold a deeper meaning. Recently, a member of the community reached out to Barbara with a special request.

"I was honored to paint some really special rocks for her children," she says. "This was a young mother of two who had lost her husband to cancer. One of her children wanted a rock with a rubber ducky painted on it; the other one wanted a slytherin from Harry Potter."

Another rock featured the likeness of the Muppets character "Animal," the wild and frenzied red head who played the drums.

"There have been so many special rocks. But those really do have a special significance for me."

Barbara Burris looks forward to more painted rocks, more smiles and good cheer.

"That's what it is all really about." NDN

Next Door Neighbors

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