

A Head for Hats, a Heart for Helping

NANCY SPENCER SAYS she is “not only a master procrastinator, but also majorly obsessive.”

It shows in her spectacular collection of wildlife art, in her fascination with glass and kaleidoscopes, and, most recently, in her production of knitted hats that she gives away to people who need them.

In the 10 years that she has been knitting for charity, she has completed 5,094 hats, all to be given to people who need them. Homeless people, people without money to buy hats, people with cancer. More than 5,000 people have warmer heads, more protection against the cold, and something beautiful and hand-made, with love, to wear. Her obsessiveness has had a grand outcome.

The project began innocently enough, when she joined in a prayer shawl project for her parents’ church. Spencer knew, even at that time, that “if I start knitting, I won’t want to do anything else.”

But she jumped in anyways, making prayer shawls, and then moving on to lap robes, making a couple hundred to give away.

Eleven or 12 years ago, she was visiting her sister in Vermont and saw an ad for a charity project to collect hats for needy children. At about the same time, a friend’s yarn store was going out of



business, and the friend sent her remaining yarn to Spencer.

Spencer was living in the office of her business in Maryland, and she had free time. Her business - Rent-a-Computer - started in 1983, had reached the end of its life, and Spencer was doing all one needs to do to finish it off.

It had been a successful business, as in 1983, not everyone had a personal computer, and renting was a great option for individuals and businesses alike. Spencer had worked for the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, DC, for 10 years, ending as an accountant, a job that suited her skills and tendencies.

Fire Company Answered 100 Calls in 2023

THE WACHAPREAGUE VOLUNTEER FIRE Department was dispatched to 100 calls in 2023, according to Fire Chief Sean Fate, who supplied the Times with 2023 statistics. In 2022, Fate writes, the department was dispatched to 91 calls.

Of the 100 calls in 2023, 16 were structure fires and 19 were motor vehicle accidents. Most of the calls - 65 percent - were for neighboring communities of Quinby, Melfa, Keller, Painter, Locustville and Pungoteague.

An average of seven members responded per call, with as many as 15 on several of the calls.

Fate says the department goes a good job documenting other volunteer time that goes into supporting the community and the fire company.

Between training, meetings, fundraising, administrative work and maintenance on vehicles and equipment, the members of the company volunteered almost 2,000 hours, in addition to running emergency calls. The annual Fireman’s Carnival accounting for most of those hours.

Fate writes that the carnival is a huge task every year and it would not be successful without the dedication and help from the community and other organizations volunteering their time as well. He and the company appreciate all the support and help.

This and That

VDOT IS PREPARING to pave Brooklyn and Atlantic avenues, and is cutting tree limbs and brush in preparation.

Eventually, the streets connecting Atlantic and Brooklyn will be paved, too, with the rest of the town to be paved sometime in the future.



THE ISLAND HOUSE will reopen on Jan. 25.

THE NEXT TOWN COUNCIL meeting is set for Feb. 9. in the conference room of the main

Hats, from front

When she left to start the computer-rental business with her former husband, personal computers were just coming into being. At its height, the business - which expanded to become RAC Solutions - employed 50 people, she says. But after 9/11, the need began to fall off. "Eight years ago," she says, "the last reliable manager left."

Spencer went up to clear everything out, and began knitting hats. It was 2014, and in that year, she knitted about 300 hats. In 2015, with the business closed and done, she knitted about 450 hats.

Those years are the only ones for which she doesn't have exact counts; she's estimated the totals from the photos she took. From 2016 on, she has exact counts, down to her daily production.

A cousin in Virginia Beach is responsible for supplying most

of the yarn, and donating most of the hats. They've gone to an orphanage in Raleigh, to shelters and programs for homeless people, to some food pantries, and to various other charities, near and far. Some hats have gone to Italy. A box of 50 is going to Vermont. They've gone to people from Maine to California, though most go to people in Virginia and North Carolina.

Spencer says that in general, she doesn't buy the yarn, and she never sells the hats.

If you have yarn and would like to give it to her, she would welcome it, as long as it is worsted-weight acrylic yarn.

You can bring the yarn to her at her home at 2 Bayview Ave., Wachapreague, or mail it to her at PO Box 420, Wachapreague.

Some health issues, and the solitary times during Covid, gave her space and time to continue knitting.

"The only way I could feel reasonably human was to sit and be quiet," she says, "and so I knitted."

The hats fit people from grade school age to adult. And, she says, "I do your standard nearly-one-size-fits-all. I'm into the least stressful approach possible. I don't have to look while I'm knitting," she says.

"It's not work for me."

And the Winner Is...

THE FIRST ANNUAL Wachapreague Times Person of the Year is Sean Fate.

Fate is the chief of the Wachapreague Volunteer Fire Department, and also is the watercraft operations manager for VIMS.

In addition to his work leading the fire department, he provides important linkage and liaison work between the town and the fire department.

It was this that people mentioned when they explained why they voted for him.

The voting was quite tight, with Steve Joseph and Charlie



Gibble running close behind Fate, and Pat Hart trailing, just a bit.

The Times will ask people to vote again at the end of 2024, so please keep it in mind as you go through the year.

More This & That

VIMS building on Atlantic Avenue.

At the Dec. 12 meeting, Vice Mayor Sandie Puchalski said that signs to be installed at the dog park include one that says that if you have an aggressive dog, it must remain leashed while in the park. Another will say you must clean up after your dog.

COUNCILMAN BOB WILLIAMS said that after the holidays (i.e., now), a computer will be checking the speed of cars going past the speed-limit sign on Main Street every half hour, and will download the information.

AMANDA MONROE, chief of the Wachapreague Coast Guard station, said, in response to an article in the Shore Daily News, that "There is no intention to close the station."

"There is a service-wide staffing issue. A military-wide staffing issue. Civilian businesses are having shortages," she said.

"The current proposal is only for reduced manning during limited hours," she wrote. It will continue until April 1.

"Prior to the end date of this change in operational status at

Station Wachapreague, the Fifth District Commander will re-evaluate personnel readiness levels and determine if there may be a need to extend the change further."

According to the Daily News, Accomack supervisors agreed to reach out to congressional leaders to voice their dismay at the reduced Coast Guard presence.

Supervisor Donald Hart said that the Coast Guard has attempted to close Station Wachapreague in the past and he sees this round of reduced staffing as another attempt.

Monroe said that the service "has had to temporarily adjust operations while prioritizing our life-saving missions, national security and protection of the marine transportation system."

PART-TIME RESIDENT

Raymond Vickery has published "The Man Followed by Fire," a novel of coming of age on the Eastern Shore.

The book is available on Amazon.



THE DESIGNS on this house on Bayview Avenue, above, are not painted on - they are reflections from items hanging in windows in the house next door. This is probably a once-a-year event - Wachapreague Stonehenge?