

MAKING



AT HOME IN THE LIMELIGHT

You might say Stephanie Davis is circling home in her theatrical career. She first performed, in 1987, in the Cape Coral Community Theatre's production of *The Octet Bridge Club*. Now she's returned to take her greatest leading role, as managing director of Cultural Park Theatre in Cape Coral, home to the rechristened Cultural Park Theatre Company.

"At the time I performed with them, there was no theater facility," Davis recalls. "So we performed in storefronts and schools and rehearsed in homes. Now they have this great little theater. When I heard they were looking for a managing director, I was interested. Because of my community theater start, it was something close to my heart."

Davis built a successful theatrical career in Southwest Florida from her humble start. By 1993, she was acting professionally and she worked for five years at what was then the Pirate Playhouse. She augmented her theater income by working as a producer for *Troubleshooter* on Fox television and as the region's first female programmer on rock radio station 99X.

DAVIS WILL CONTINUE TO ACT, PROBABLY IN THE SUMMERTIME, WITH FLORIDA REP.

When Bob Cacioppo formed Florida Repertory Theater and settled into Ft. Myers's Arcade Theatre, he lured Davis into theater full-time. "I worked as his assistant and quickly wore quite a few hats," she recalls with a laugh. "I was in charge of casting, marketing, and education, but my title was 'associate director.'"

Davis, who also writes the "Downtown Diva" weekly social column for *The News-Press*, will encounter the same



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Stephanie Davis has trod the boards at the Pirate Playhouse and the Arcade, and now takes a lead role at Cultural Park Theatre in Cape Coral.

many-hats routine in her position at Cultural Park Theatre. She is determined to increase community awareness of and involvement with the sometimes struggling group. Despite a core of deeply committed volunteers, the company has plenty of opportunities for anyone interested in theater and building membership is one of her priorities. So is increasing ticket sales for the company's eight annual productions. (The theater also has an alliance with Florida Gulf Coast University, through which the college's theater troupe brings in one show annually.)

"We offer really great subscription

deals," Davis pitches. "Tickets are fifteen dollars a show, but you can get a subscription to all nine for ninety dollars."

Davis will also keep her hand in artistic aspects, directing shows at Cultural Park, and appearing, probably in the summer, with Florida Rep.

"Theater is all I know how to do," she insists. "I love it. It's my avocation as well as my vocation."

For information on Cultural Park Theater Company's shows, subscriptions, and volunteer opportunities, call 239/772-5862.

— Janina Birtolo

WAVES



REBUILDING LIVES IN RWANDA

Dan Dodrill is best known on Sanibel for building homes at The Sanctuary, Beachview, and Butterknife. But a current project takes him a world away from luxury development. It is this project in Rwanda, Africa, that gives Dodrill his deepest sense of satisfaction.

At the behest of his brother Mark, National Director for Youth for Christ in Barcelona, Spain, Dan joined a mission trip to Rwanda with Youth for Christ in East Africa.

Millions of Rwandans who escaped genocide into neighboring countries are now trickling back to resettle and redevelop their devastated homeland.

Recently, the Rwandan government agreed to sell Youth for Christ a seventeen-acre plot of land for \$170,000 to help exiles rebuild their lives. Dan and a handful of other businessmen helped raise money to buy the property and now they're helping build a 7,000-square-foot training

facility that Dan designed. Vocational instructors will teach different agricultural methods as well as such skills as carpentry, construction, and welding—skills locals are learning as they build the facility.

In July he made a trip for a progress-check on a concrete slab. “The exiles, many of them women and children, had dug, broken, and chiseled rock by hand for its foundation. The men constructed wood forms, then hand-mixed and poured concrete for the slab,” he recounts. “When I put a tape on it, it was within a quarter inch of square—as good as anything American construction workers with modern tools produce here.”

Other Southwest Florida business people, primarily in the building industry, have since joined Dan's efforts as teachers and financial supporters. Returning to Rwanda in November with Dan and another brother, Dave, were John Gilmore and his son as well as several others in the local construction industry, and a volun-



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAULA ROBERTSON & ASSOCIATES, INC.

Dan Dodrill

teer from Indiana. Former Lee County school board member Lanny Moore donated money for a pickup truck for the villagers' use.

For information on how to help, call Dan Dodrill at 239/466-3955.

—Linda Heffley Keller



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Esther Ruffin

JOY CART REPLACES CASKET

Esther Ruffin, an effervescent 92-year-old, is one of the most joyful people one could hope to meet anywhere. So it's no surprise to find her driving a dark-green golf cart, known as her “Joy Cart,” taking

fellow residents on errands around Shell Point Retirement Community in Ft. Myers. What is a surprise is that she obtained the golf cart by “trading in my casket, which was also dark green,” she says.

“About five years ago, after selling my home in Williamsburg, Virginia, I used the money to prepay my funeral. That included being buried in my dark-green robe in a dark-green casket and a reception in Williamsburg, where I had stayed in a retirement home.” However, Ruffin moved to Shell Point during the summer of 2001.

“A few months ago,” Ruffin continues, “I realized all that would be a big chore for my son, John, who lives in California. I changed everything and decided to be cremated. I want my ashes to go in the plot by my husband in Williamsburg.”

Ruffin got a refund and forgot about it until her name came up for a golf cart parking spot at Shell Point. “Those parking spots are scarce,” Ruffin notes. “I called the Shell Point garage and they had just purchased four brand-new golf carts... They'd already sold three and had only one left,” she continues.

“When they brought it over, I said, ‘Oh, my goodness!’ I realized it was the same shade as my casket and my green velvet robe!”

“I just knew it was meant for me. I had the money in the bank. I said, ‘I'll buy it if you paint the word “Joy” on the front.’ So now I have my Joy Cart and it gives me such pleasure to take people to the bank, dining room, and library.”

—Libby Grimm

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PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

John Ravenhill keeps the classic craft of bookbinding alive at Davall and Chown in Ft. Myers.

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

Step into the Davall and Chown bookbindery on Main Street in downtown Ft. Myers and it's like stepping back in time. The shop walls are displayed with ornamental tools dating back 300 to 350 years. Proprietor John Ravenhill still uses them, especially when working with books that are just as old.

The easygoing Ravenhill, who calls his age "a sweet 65," was trained in English hand bookbinding. His specialty is "custom fine binding, repairing and restoring old Bibles and old and new books, personal documents of historic value, and leather-bound books for presentation."

London-born Ravenhill is the grandson and son of bookbinders. At age fourteen, he embarked on a seven-year bookbinding apprenticeship, training partly with a commercial company and partly at the British Museum. He then joined the venerable Davall and Chown bindery, a London-based firm in existence since 1860.

In 1967, Ravenhill took over Davall and Chown from the grandson of the original founder. About a decade later, Ravenhill discovered that the Lee County coast was a great place to vacation and by 1988 he decided to take a permanent vacation—early retirement—and move to Ft. Myers. His daughter stayed in London to run the company, which she changed into a bookselling business.

"After moving to Ft. Myers, I bought a boat. But then I spent all my money with Sea Tow so I had to open up shop again in 1990," Ravenhill says jokingly. Actually, he explains, he reopened Davall and Chown "to experiment with some advanced styles of bookbinding, including lace on boards, split boards, Russian-banded, and gold-leaf tooling."

Ravenhill's stateside bindery is a one-man band, although he does have an employee who handles desktop publishing. His working hours prove that his retirement is a thing of the past, because he's in the shop from 7 a.m. until 4 p.m. on weekdays and also works until noon on Saturday. ("I get to work daily at 7 a.m., but who would want to see me before 9 a.m.? And I wouldn't want to see them, either.")

Over the decades, on both sides of the ocean, Ravenhill's clients have included Queen Elizabeth II, the British government, and scores of universities in the United Kingdom and the United States.

"There aren't many of us left who do this," Ravenhill notes. "I know of six in the United States and one of those has just retired. The profession is more popular in England than in the United States, but is still getting hard to find there. I am the end product of a style of teaching that dates from the late Victorian era."

— Libby Grimm

Visitors' Views

An introduction to a few of the many remarkable visitors to Southwest Florida



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID ADLER

David Adler's ecotourism business is breathing new life into a Nova Scotia fishing village. He is a regular on Captiva, where his grandmother, Connie Rosenberg (right), winters.

ECOTOUR OPERATOR LEADS THE WAY TO HIGHER PROSPECTS

Once in a while, a generous visionary comes along with a sense of social responsibility that weaves itself into the fabric of his life and the lives of those around him. David Adler, age twenty-nine, a regular visitor to Captiva Island, is one who has committed that generosity and drive to help rebuild the Nova Scotia village he calls home.

Raised in the United States, Adler pursued marine ecology and environmental studies and received his college degree in Halifax. After graduation, he began to study Lower Prospect, the tiny Nova Scotia village where he and partner Jillian

Brown make their home. The town lies just thirty minutes outside metropolitan Halifax and is surrounded by tourist destinations, yet it has been in economic decline since the collapse of the groundfish industry. As haddock, cod, and other fish that have sustained generations have disappeared over the past decade, locals have been giving up and leaving the little hamlet of two hundred. Its outlook seemed bleak with no restaurant, no hotel, not even a central meeting place.

About 1997, Adler took a chance and founded a new kind of business in the tradition-oriented community. A flotilla of colorful kayaks suddenly peppered the village and East Coast Outfitters (E.C.O.) was born. Over time, Adler added a two-

story boathouse and expansive wharf area that perches on a narrow spit of land surrounded by water. For Halifax paddlers, it's a destination; for locals, it's become home.

From the beginning, Adler involved his neighbors. He taught more than forty local kids to kayak, free of charge, and is training them as guides. He hires local boat operators to provide support for his group trips.

A peek at the E.C.O. Web site (www.EastCoastOutfitters.net) reveals Adler's vision: To promote cultural tourism and ecotourism as economic resources for his community. Residents are finding new opportunities and it's probably no small coincidence that an E.C.O. employee is Lower Prospect's first-ever college student.

The business recently won the prestigious 2002 Best New Business of the Year award from the Metro Halifax Chamber of Commerce.

In October, Adler and Brown played host to sixty or seventy townsfolk at the E.C.O. boathouse, providing sixty pounds of turkey. In a community that has seen its share of dark days in recent years, he says, "It was a true thanksgiving."

Adler is very low-key about the changes he's effecting at home. As the snow sets in, he and Brown, who works for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, will be taking another Captiva break. Adler's looking forward to a paddle to Buck Key and, he adds, while breaking into a grin, "I'm also a sucker for cheeseburgers and rum drinks."

For twenty-five years, Adler has visited Captiva, where his grandmother, Connie Rosenberg, winters. "The most remarkable thing about the island is the wildlife," he says. "Just being out on the water and having dolphins, otters, and birds all around you, you just have a sense you're much closer to wildlife here. We have seals, porpoises, and whales at home, but down here, a dolphin can come up right next to your kayak. That sort of thing seems less surprising here; in Nova Scotia, you'd be terrified if something that big came up close."

— Libby Boren McMillan

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PHOTO BY KEN SHORIAK

Patti Chlipala

A HELPING HAND

It was a desire to be in health care that brought Patti Chlipala to her position as director of development for the Lee Memorial Health System Foundation. She wanted to apply her master's degree in business administration to help people.

Chlipala oversees fund-raising events and contributions that help keep the system's various programs running. Whether it's Lee Cancer Care, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, or maintaining hospital equipment, a large part of the financing comes from the foundation's efforts. In addition to special events, contributions come from corporate sponsorships, employer-matching programs, and individual donations.

"It's very rewarding to provide funds for things that the health system needs for the community and to support the physicians and nurses," she says and adds, "You want the best equipment here if you ever need it."

Her greatest satisfaction comes from dealing with the contributors. "I've never met more generous people who give of their time," she comments. "They are all volunteers." The variety of fund-raising events and activities means there's something to suit about any volunteer. (Lee Memorial has its own program for hospital volunteers.) "It's a great way to get out and meet the community," she adds.

"We're always looking for ways to get people involved and make new contacts within the community." (For more information call 239/437-1840, or visit the Web site at www.lmhsf.org.)

— Julie Clay

Making Waves is *Times of the Islands'* honor roll for Southwest Floridians who, in their everyday lives, make the community and the Lee Island Coast special. If you know of someone who deserves recognition, call us at 239/472-0205 or 239/472-0629.



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