NOVEMBER 2026

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Community News and more!

PHOTO BY CHARISMA AT A BREW & YOU HEADSHOTS

MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS

THE WEEKS FAMILY

A SEASON FOR GRATITUDE

DEAR NEIGHBORS,

There's something about fall that seems to invite us to slow down. The days grow shorter, the air turns cooler and before we know it, the holiday season is upon us. November, in particular, offers a welcome reminder to pause and appreciate what matters most.

Thanksgiving naturally brings gratitude to the forefront, but often it's the smaller things that mean the most: a quiet morning with a cup of coffee, dinner around the table, a walk through the neighborhood on a crisp afternoon or an unexpected conversation with a friend. It's easy to move quickly through our days without stopping to notice just how many good things surround us.

That sense of gratitude extends to our community, too. A neighborhood is so much more than the homes and streets that make it up. It's the familiar faces we see on our walks, the friends who gather around our tables, the neighbors who lend a hand and the traditions that bring us together year after year.

As you prepare for Thanksgiving and the busy holiday season ahead, I hope you'll find time to enjoy the simple pleasures of fall and the people who make this season special.

And from all of us at *Stroll*, thank you for welcoming us into your homes each month and for continuing to share your families, celebrations, milestones and stories with us. We are truly grateful to be part of this community.

Wishing you and your family a very happy Thanksgiving!

Warmly,
Ashley and Nathan Grimm
Publishers, *Stroll*

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE!

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THE WEEKS FAMILY

FINDING HOME THROUGH COMMUNITY

THE WEEKS FAMILY — Katie and Jason, Ian, 12, and Hanna, 10 — found that sense of home in Ballantyne after moving to Charlotte in 2020. Katie grew up in Wisconsin, while Jason is originally from the Twin Cities. Jason's career brought them to Raleigh in 2015 and then to Charlotte in 2020. "Ballantyne felt like a place where we could put down roots and become part of a community," Katie says. "The people we've met here have made it feel like home."

Those roots now include the children's schools, sports, the arts, Ballantyne Country Club and friendships throughout the neighborhood. Ian, a seventh grader at Cato Ridge, plays on the school golf team, enjoys mountain biking with friends and, like many 12-year-olds, appreciates a good video game. Hanna, a fifth grader at Ballantyne Elementary, is happiest on or near a stage.

The family discovered just how meaningful those community connections could be when Katie was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2022. She underwent seven surgeries, and throughout her treatment, friends and neighbors stepped in with meals, gifts and encouragement. "We felt cared for when we needed it most," Katie says.

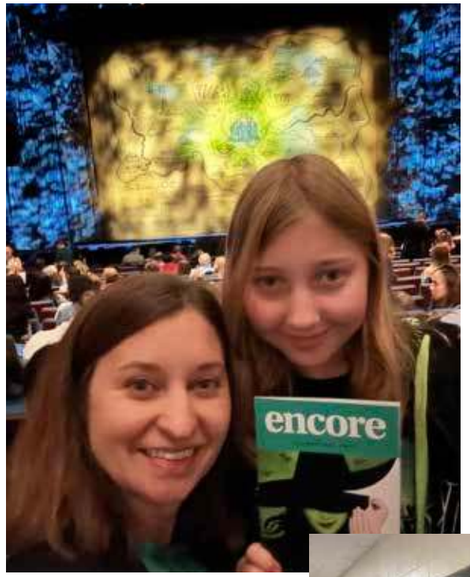
Giving back has long been important to the Weeks family as well. Katie and Jason began teaching Ian and Hanna about helping others when the children were very young, including through a family birthday tradition that turns celebrations into opportunities to support local organizations. Their commitment to service extends into Katie and Jason's professional and community lives as well.

Jason has built his career in human resources leadership and currently leads the North American HR function at JELD-WEN. He earned his degree in psychology from Gustavus Adolphus College.

Katie, who studied theatre and communication at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, is a Senior Advisor with Armstrong McGuire, a nonprofit consulting firm. Drawing on about 25 years of nonprofit experience, she helps organizations navigate leadership transitions, executive searches and interim leadership. Her work has connected her with nonprofit leaders and organizations throughout Charlotte and across North Carolina. She is a member of the Women's Impact Fund, while Jason has been involved with the BCC Employee Assistance Fund since its founding.

Long before life in Ballantyne, however, Katie and Jason's story began in Wisconsin. Jason's career had taken him from Minnesota to Milwaukee in 2007, where the two met through mutual friends. They continued crossing paths that spring and summer, and, as Katie tells it, Jason made a few strategic wagers that resulted in him "winning" a few dates. Three years later, they married in the Dominican Republic.

Travel remains one of their favorite ways to spend time together. Their honeymoon took them to New Zealand and Bora Bora, where crossing the International Date Line allowed them to celebrate New Year's Eve twice. As a family, they have traveled to destinations including Cancun, Puerto Rico, Amelia Island and the Bahamas. One memorable adventure was an RV trip to the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon and Zion National Park.



Family travel also tends to follow individual passions. Jason is an avid golfer who enjoys visiting courses on Top 100 lists — with a few great spas worked into the itinerary for Katie. Ian has inherited his dad's love of golf, and the two are now dreaming up father-son golf trips.

Meanwhile, Katie and Hanna have their own tradition. Katie was a theatre major long before Hanna became the family performer, and Hanna plans to appear in five shows with the Morrison Youth Theatre this year. After a family trip to New York City revealed that the girls loved the city considerably more than the boys, the mother-daughter pair began an annual January birthday trip centered on seeing as many shows as possible. A snowstorm extended one trip, giving them enough time to see seven shows in five days.

Through it all, the Weeks have found what they were hoping for when they chose Ballantyne six years ago: a place where their children could grow up surrounded by community. For their family, that's not simply about finding people who will be there for you. It's also about teaching the next generation to be there for others.

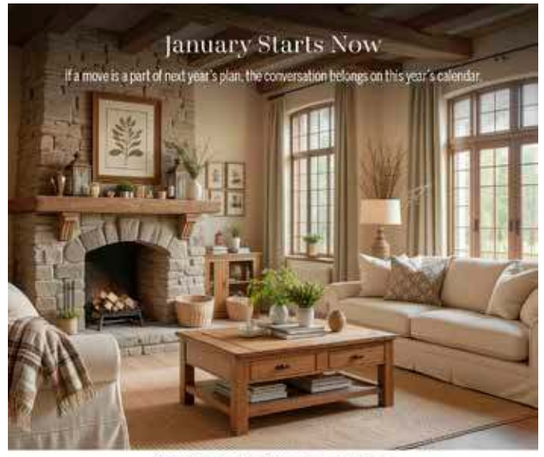
To recommend a family to be featured, please email Delia at ballantyne@strollmag.com.

BIRTHDAY GIVE BACKS

When Ian and Hanna were little, the Weeks family started a tradition they call "Birthday Give Backs." Instead of focusing on presents, the children invite friends and family to help support a local organization.

Over the years, their birthdays have collected school supplies for Ballantyne Elementary, 550 dental kits for Classroom Central, 110 sports balls for Ronald McDonald House, winter wear for OurBRIDGE for Kids, baking supplies for Habitat for Humanity and more. Hanna's 2023 birthday provided 107 blankets and stuffed animals for Levine Cancer Institute, while her 2026 Give Back raised $521 for Blumenthal Performing Arts' Junior Theater Festival.

The spirit extends beyond the kids' birthdays, too. During Katie's cancer journey, the family made more than 44 cancer care packages in honor of her 44th birthday. "We hope they grow up knowing that giving feels good and that even a birthday party can be a chance to care for someone else," Katie says.



THE GIVING TUESDAY GUIDE

Your practical reminders for charitable donations ahead of the holiday season.

BY NICOLE LETTS

This year, Giving Tuesday falls on December 1. Since it's after the frenzy of Black Friday and the fury of Cyber Monday, it can become an afterthought. Instead of making lists and checking them twice, Giving Tuesday allows us a moment to think about those who need a pinch more assistance to make the season extra bright. With a little planning, you can make the most of your contribution, stretching your gift further.

Check for employee matching.
Many companies will match employee donations dollar-for-dollar, and some even match volunteer hours with a cash contribution. It costs nothing to ask your HR department, and it can effectively double your gift to a cause you already care about. Matching programs often have deadlines or annual caps, so now is a smart time to check whether you've used yours for the year.

Consider fewer, larger gifts.
While it's tempting to spread a giving budget across several organizations, concentrating your donation can have more impact. Smaller nonprofits, in particular, spend real time and money processing each gift, so a single larger donation reduces overhead, sending more toward actual programs. Pick one or two organizations to support meaningfully this year and rotate to others in future years.

Do your homework.
A quick look at a charity's annual report or a nonprofit evaluator site can tell you how funds are used. Look for clarity about where donations go, not just a compelling appeal. For any gift you plan to deduct, save the receipt or acknowledgment letter from the organization. Most send one automatically for donations over $250. Keep a simple folder (digital or paper) for the year's giving so nothing gets lost by tax season.

Think beyond cash.
Some organizations need volunteer time, supplies, or in-kind donations just as much as money. A few hours of your time may go just as far as your dollar.

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Social Pet Hotel & Daycare: Raising the Standard of Care

NEW INVESTMENTS, PERSONALIZED EXPERIENCES AND A CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO EVERY DOG

BY CONTENT COORDINATOR DELIA MCMULLEN

“Every dog has a unique personality, energy level and set of needs.”

For more than a decade, Social Pet Hotel & Daycare has built its business around a simple idea: dogs aren’t one-size-fits-all. As 2026 comes to a close, owners Amy and Bill Hillis are continuing to build on that philosophy with new facility investments, expanded enrichment opportunities and plans to enhance the customer experience across all three Social Pet locations.

One of this year’s biggest improvements happened at the Pineville location, where Social Pet completed the installation of a whole-facility generator. The project began in 2023 and required extensive planning and approvals from Mecklenburg County and the Town of Pineville.

The investment goes far beyond convenience during a power outage. Because air cleanliness and circulation are critical to the dogs’ safety and well-being, the generator is large enough to keep the entire facility operating during outages caused by severe weather or other environmental conditions.

Another anticipated addition became a reality this year when the Northlake sensory enrichment garden opened. Social Pet introduced its first purpose-built sensory garden at the Charlotte location in September 2025, an initiative highlighted in the February *Stroll* feature. Since then, the concept has proven popular, with enrichment sessions booking in advance.

“We’ve seen firsthand that enrichment can be just as valuable as physical exercise,” the Social Pet team says. Filled with different scents, textures and interactive elements, the gardens allow dogs to explore and engage their natural instincts in a calm, stimulating environment. They can be especially helpful for dogs more selective about socializing or participating in group play.

That individualized approach remains central to Social Pet. A shy dog might do best in a smaller playgroup with extra one-on-one attention, while a senior dog may need a quieter schedule and more rest. High-energy dogs can enjoy additional physical and mental stimulation in the Adventure Park, while dogs less interested in group play can participate in individualized enrichment sessions or spend time in the sensory gardens.

“We’ve seen firsthand that enrichment can be just as valuable as physical exercise.”

For first-time guests, that personalization begins with an assessment designed to help the team understand the dog’s personality, play style and comfort level. Pet parents are encouraged to provide details about routines, preferences and medications so the team can make the transition as comfortable as possible. Current vaccination records and a negative fecal test are required.

For Amy and Bill, however, one of the most meaningful measures of Social Pet’s growth isn’t a new facility feature or service. It’s the team and culture they have built.

When Social Pet opened in summer 2014, it had just a couple of employees and fewer than 10 dogs. Today, the business has grown into three locations and serves thousands of families. Amy and Bill say they are especially proud of creating meaningful careers while building a community that pet owners trust.

And they’re already looking toward 2027. Social Pet plans to focus on further improving the customer experience, with additional emphasis on staff training and customer service. Grooming and training services are expected to expand across all three locations, and the team is exploring additional ways to serve dogs that thrive with individualized, one-on-one attention rather than traditional group play.

The goal is growth without losing the personal approach that has defined Social Pet from the beginning — continuing to evolve while making sure every dog receives the experience that works best for them.

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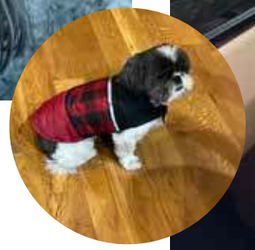
To have your business featured in an upcoming issue, please email ashley.grimm@n2co.com.

HOLIDAY PET CARE: PLAN AHEAD

Holiday travel can mean a busy season at Social Pet, so families needing lodging are encouraged to reserve as early as possible — ideally several weeks to a couple of months in advance for major holidays. Once travel dates are set, booking early can help ensure your dog has a spot. Before a stay, make sure vaccinations are current and let the Social Pet team know about your dog’s routines, preferences, medications or other special needs. A little preparation can help make the experience more comfortable for both pets and their families. Holiday grooming is also popular for pups getting ready for family gatherings and photos. **For an extra dose of holiday cheer, Social Pet will offer photos with Santa November 17 through December 3, with specific dates varying by location.**



JACK

Jack-o'-lantern: The granddog who stole their hearts

When Peggy and John Gallo said goodbye to their dog, Cooper, in 2021, they were certain they would never have another dog. Then along came Jack.

Jack, an 8-year-old shih tzu, technically belongs to their daughter, Carson Lee, and her boyfriend, Bryson. But after living with Peggy and John for most of 2024 and through July 2025, he quickly earned another title: beloved granddog.

And like many grandchildren, Jack may be just a little bit spoiled. "Very spoiled by the grandparents," Carson Lee and Bryson confirm.

Jack's full name is actually Jack-o'-lantern, a nod to the night he was adopted: Halloween. While his name may be festive, his personality is sweet and easygoing year-round.

During his time with Peggy and John, Jack settled into a comfortable daily routine. At night, he slept on their bed near their feet. By morning, he would make his way up to Peggy's pillow and curl around her head, providing a furry and impossible-to-ignore wake-up call.

Then it was time to get the day started. Every morning, Jack would first find John and make sure breakfast was served. Once he had eaten, he turned his attention to Peggy, pestering her until she put on her sneakers for their morning walk.

Those walks around the neighborhood loop became one of Jack's favorite activities. A friend to seemingly every human he meets, he loves seeing who is out and stopping to say hello. His neighbors became some of his biggest fans, too.

Jack also has very particular tastes when it comes to food. Forget ordinary dog treats. He prefers American cheese, bacon and meat — further evidence that life with the grandparents suited him quite well.

But beneath all that pampering is an especially intuitive little dog. The family jokingly calls Jack a "low-key emotional support dog." If someone is upset or overwhelmed, he seems to sense it and insists on being held until things calm down. Whether playing, walking or simply cuddling, Jack is happiest when he is right by someone's side.

He is also an enthusiastic traveler who loves car rides, especially trips to visit family in New Jersey and New York.

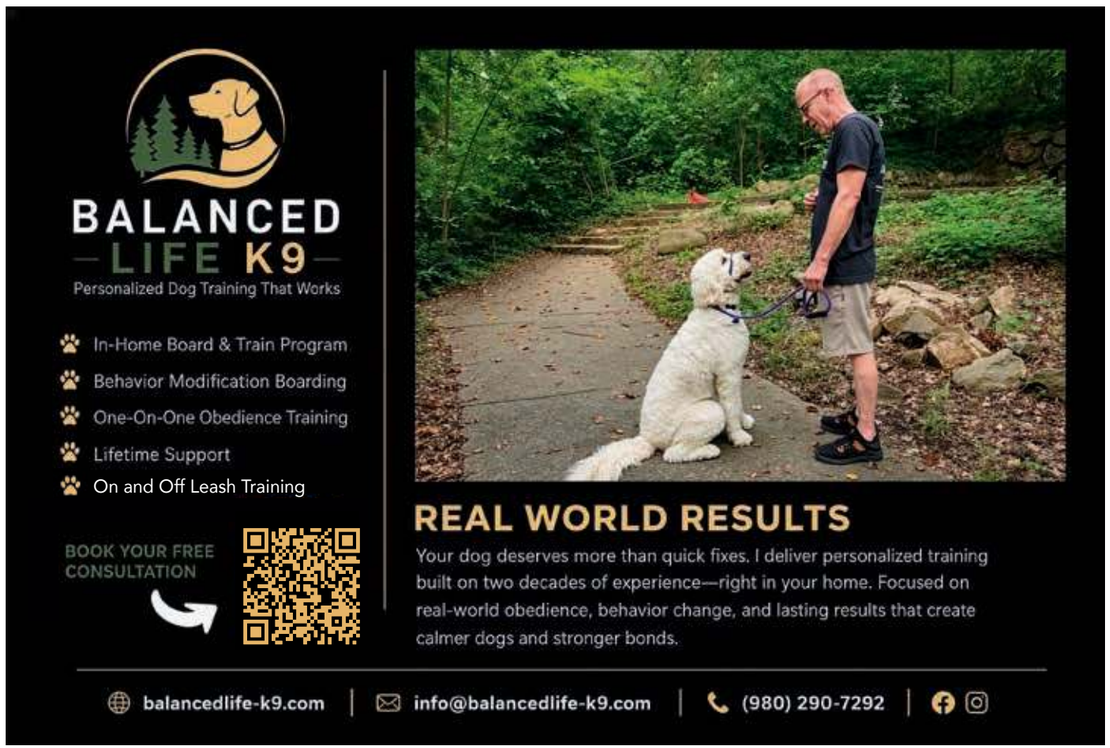
In July 2025, Jack moved with Carson Lee and Bryson to Austin, TX, leaving Peggy and John with a much quieter house. Fortunately, distance hasn't changed his attachment to his Charlotte home — or theirs to him.

Whenever Peggy and John visit Austin, they try to convince the "kids" to let Jack come home with them until their next visit. And when Jack returns to Charlotte, he can't wait to walk his familiar neighborhood loop, revisit his favorite spots and greet the people he remembers.

With visits planned for this fall, his Charlotte fan club won't have to wait too long.

After losing Cooper, Peggy and John never expected another dog to occupy such a special place in their lives. Jack had other plans. "He just makes every day so pleasant," Peggy says. "He fills our hearts with love."

To have your pet featured, please email Delia at ballantyne@strollmag.com.



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CRISIS ASSISTANCE MINISTRY

Neighbors helping neighbors

BY CONTRIBUTING WRITER NICOLE AYERS, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Most in this community have never had to wonder whether a single surprise expense or one missed paycheck could cost us our home. For thousands of families across Charlotte-Mecklenburg, that worry is a daily companion.

Consider Nikki. She was thrilled to start a new job, but a short gap between paychecks left a hole in her budget, and landlords rarely make exceptions. Nervous and a little scared, she walked into Crisis Assistance Ministry not knowing what to expect. A caseworker listened with compassion, arranged an emergency rent payment to stop her eviction and connected her to additional resources. Nikki left with her home stabilized and with her confidence restored.

Stories like hers are repeated every day, and the numbers explain why. Since 2010, average rent in Charlotte has climbed 61%, while wages have barely moved. A minimum-wage worker would need to log 125 hours a week to afford a one-bedroom apartment at $1,180. Last fiscal year, Crisis Assistance Ministry helped 44,000 people with $5.6 million in emergency housing assistance, keeping families in their homes and their lights on.

Founded in 1975 by local faith leaders, Crisis Assistance Ministry has been the community's basic-needs safety net for half a century. Its focus is families who are not yet homeless but are one setback away. Beyond rent and utility help, it offers financial empowerment coaching and a Free Store stocked with donated clothing, shoes, coats, school uniforms and household essentials, all at no charge.

For neighbors who want to help, the path is simple. Give a financial gift, which goes directly toward keeping families stably housed. Provide a winter coat. Donate new or gently used items to the Free Store. Volunteer your time. Or share what you've learned with a friend.

A stable home changes everything for a family and for a community. Join us in making sure Nikki's story is the rule rather than the exception.

Carol Hardison joined the Ballantyne Country Club Book Club to discuss Brian Goldstone's "There Is No Place for Us: Working and Homeless in America."

Carol Hardison and Katie Weeks of Armstrong Maguire

SEARCH FOR A NEW LEADER

Carol Hardison, CEO of Crisis Assistance Ministry, will be retiring soon after leading the agency for 26 years. Armstrong Maguire's Katie Weeks, whose family is featured in this issue, is leading the search for a new CEO.

Crisis Assistance Ministry is entering this transition from a position of organizational strength. The agency has an exceptional leadership team, dedicated staff, committed volunteers, strong governance and a clear vision for the future.

HAPPY FALL, Y'ALL!

Pumpkin Patch Patios decorated the main clubhouse and FAC with festive autumn decor.

THE KISNER CLASSIC

This fun event at BCC in September, the third annual, was held in memory of Susan Kisner. Participants dressed in festive pink attire and raised money for the Kay Yow Cancer Fund. There was beautiful weather, lots of laughs and a few questionable shots.

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DILWORTH MATTRESS FACTORY: MADE IN CHARLOTTE, MADE FOR YOU

Behind the scenes at Dilworth Mattress Factory, where four generations of craftsmanship meet personalized comfort

BY CONTENT COORDINATOR DELIA MCMULLEN

Dori and Scott Hirsch

For nearly 95 years, Dilworth Mattress Factory has been helping Charlotte residents get a better night's sleep. But what many customers may not realize is that the mattress they select in the showroom is made specifically for them, right here in Charlotte.

Fourth-generation owner Scott Hirsch and his wife, Dori, continue a family tradition that began in 1931, combining time-tested craftsmanship with modern materials and personalized service.

From Showroom to Factory Floor

Unlike most mattress retailers, Dilworth Mattress Factory doesn't keep finished mattresses in stock. Once customers select their preferred comfort and support, their order enters the production schedule.

Customers typically allow about two weeks for completion, partly because the factory's limited warehouse space requires ordering certain materials. Actual construction takes anywhere from a few hours to a full day. Much of the work is still done by hand. "We still construct mattresses using many of the same tools my grandfather used," Scott explains.

Many components are sourced locally. Foundations, foam and cover materials come from High Point, springs from Hickory and latex from Talalay, a latex manufacturer in Connecticut.

While mattress-making isn't especially complicated, quality materials and skilled craftsmanship are essential. One particularly specialized task involves operating the tape-edge machine, which sews binding around the mattress edges.

It's What's Inside That Counts

Dilworth Mattress Factory began as a mattress refurbishing business, giving older mattresses new life. That history shaped the family's philosophy about durability. "When your business starts with refurbishing mattresses, you learn to look at what's inside—how the materials have held up and how the mattress was put together," Scott says.

Today, he evaluates foam density, coil construction and gauge and cover materials to determine how well a mattress will maintain its comfort and support. Although materials have evolved considerably, the fundamental goal hasn't changed. "Good workmanship and taking care of your customers are still just as important," Scott says. The oldest Dilworth mattress Scott has personally encountered in daily use was an impressive 38 years old!

Two Sleepers, Two Solutions

One popular custom option addresses a familiar dilemma: What happens when two people sharing a bed have different comfort preferences?

Dilworth can create two individually constructed twin XL mattresses that fit together to form a king-size bed. One might be soft while the other offers firmer support. If their heights differ, Scott adjusts the foundations so the tops align. The couple can still use a single king-size mattress protector and fitted sheet, but each person enjoys their preferred comfort. "That makes everyone happy!" Scott says.

A Personal Touch

Scott and Dori have found a natural division of responsibilities. Dori handles most sales and customer relationships, while Scott oversees manufacturing, ordering and inventory. "Dori is definitely the better salesperson, which is funny because she had never worked in sales before this," Scott says. "She doesn't approach it like she's trying to sell you something. She's just very proud of our product and genuine in the way she talks with customers." Customers routinely invite Dori to lunch, even to retirement communities around Charlotte.

Scott enjoys the manufacturing side. Although he owns several businesses, he had always wanted to run a small manufacturing company. "Who knew it would turn out to be my family's mattress store?" he says.

Both value spending time with customers, something an online mattress quiz can't replicate. Scott frequently encounters couples where one partner initially insists mattress selection doesn't matter. After trying different options, that person often discovers preferences they never knew they had. "There's a difference between answering a question about firmness and actually lying on a mattress and talking about what feels comfortable," he explains.

Built to Last

While customers sometimes ask about cooling technology, natural materials or firmness levels, Scott says durability remains a major concern. Many arrive disappointed by mattresses that have lost comfort or support after just a few years. His goal is to help them find something that will perform well for years to come.

He also reminds customers that adjusting to a new mattress takes time. Rather than judging it after one night, he recommends allowing a week or more to become accustomed to the new sleeping surface.

Looking Toward the Fifth Generation

As Dilworth Mattress Factory approaches its centennial in 2031, Scott and Dori reflect on the generations of Charlotte families who have trusted the business. "We're carrying on something that has been part of other families' lives for generations, too," Scott says. "Having those families continue to trust ours is something we're very proud of."

Their sons, Ryan and Evan, are beginning their own careers in Charlotte, but both have expressed interest in someday running the factory. Dori already envisions their sons, future daughters-in-law and perhaps a few cribs in the showroom. For a business built on family, craftsmanship and a good night's sleep, that sounds like a fitting next chapter.

For more information or to explore a custom-built mattress, contact Dilworth Mattress Factory at 704-333-6564.

To have your business featured in an upcoming issue, please email Zane at zane.odom@strollmag.com.

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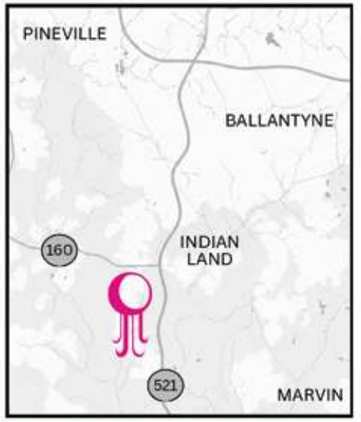

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Our *Athlete of the Month/Young Achiever* section is dedicated to highlighting the incredible talents and accomplishments of local kids and teens.

This is your chance to showcase their hard work, inspire others and give them the recognition they deserve. Submit your nominations, story ideas or even a quick note about your child's achievements—we'll take it from there!

Share your ideas with us today and help us feature standout kids and teens in our community.

Please email Delia at ballantyne@strollmag.com with ideas!

Royal Icing

Adapted from The Creative Cookier

BY CONTRIBUTING WRITER KIM GREER

INGREDIENTS

- 1 2-pound bag of confectioners' sugar (no need to sift)
- 5 Tbsp. of meringue powder (Genie's Dream Meringue Powder is my absolute favorite and what this recipe is based on; can be purchased on Amazon)
- 3/4 cup warm water plus extra
- 2 Tbsp. clear Karo Corn Syrup (adds a little sweetness, plus some elasticity and softness to the "bite")
- A couple drops of white coloring (this makes your icing pure white and prevents color bleeding)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Use a tabletop mixer. Mix meringue powder and some water together in mixing bowl on lowest speed using the whisk attachment. Once frothy, switch to the paddle attachment and add 1 cup of confectioner's sugar at a time and warm water as needed. Cover bowl to prevent sugar from flying everywhere. Mix on the lowest speed until sugar and water are incorporated. Stop mixer and add the corn syrup and a couple drops of white coloring and start mixing on medium and increasing to medium-high until icing starts to get soft peaks (no more than 5-6 minutes).
2. Test your consistency by running a knife through the icing and counting as it folds back into itself. The perfect flooding consistency is about 8-10 seconds. If it's still too thick, add a couple drops of water. If it's too runny, add more confectioner's sugar and mix about 30 seconds longer. Consistency takes time and practice. Now separate your white icing into separate bowls to color with food coloring.
3. Keep your bowls covered to prevent drying up.

Do not overbeat the icing! It will look fluffy, feel spongy and will not dry.

- Store in a tightly sealed container and stir well before using.
- Good for 6-8 days on the counter. No need to refrigerate.
- Icing can be stored in the freezer and will need 15-20 mins to thaw when ready to use. You will have to mix it well by hand after it has been frozen. Add a little confectioner's sugar to thicken it up just a bit if needed.

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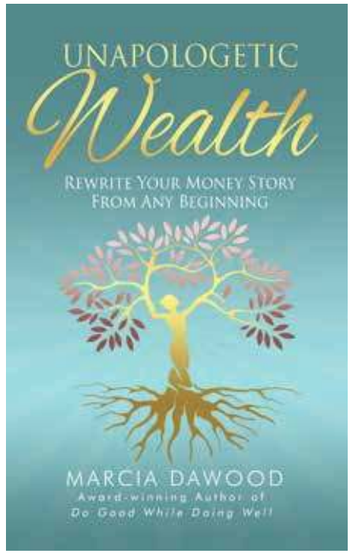
Changing the Conversation About Wealth

Ballantyne Country Club resident Marcia Dawood is helping change the conversation around money and investing with her new book, Unapologetic Wealth.



Dawood spent many years in corporate America before an invitation to an angel investing meeting in 2012 changed the direction of her career. Fascinated by entrepreneurs developing innovative solutions in healthcare, technology, education and other industries, she became increasingly involved in angel investing. Along the way, she noticed that many people — particularly women — didn't realize these investment opportunities were available to them.

That discovery eventually led to speaking engagements, a TEDx talk, a podcast and two books. Her first book, *Do Good While Doing Well*, introduced readers to angel investing and equity crowdfunding. Her latest takes a step back to examine the beliefs and experiences that shape how people think about money.

"*Unapologetic Wealth* is about letting go of those inherited beliefs," Dawood says. "It means giving yourself permission to build wealth intentionally."

For Dawood, wealth extends well beyond a bank account. She describes it as encompassing health, relationships, time, purpose and community, with money serving as a tool that can create choices and opportunities.

Dawood and her husband have strong ties to South Charlotte and Ballantyne Country Club, where they enjoy dining, events and time with friends and neighbors. This year, they further invested in the area by purchasing a Gorilla Property Services franchise serving local homeowners and businesses.

Her message to readers is simple: "Your past doesn't determine your financial future. You can rewrite your money story, make intentional choices and build wealth that reflects your values."

To share your photos, please email Delia at ballantyne@strollmag.com.

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“I’VE ARRIVED”

The world’s most memorable hotel lobbies

BY SHELLEY BENITEZ, THE ELEGANCE OF TRAVEL

There is a moment when a trip begins to feel like the escape you imagined. The doors open. Fresh flowers catch your eye. Someone welcomes you with warmth and confidence. Your shoulders relax, and a thought comes almost instinctively: *“I’ve arrived.”*

For travelers whose days are filled with meetings, decisions and responsibilities, that feeling is precious. It signals that your time away has begun—and that you are somewhere you want to be. The finest hotel lobbies create that feeling before you ever see your room. Through architecture, atmosphere and hospitality, they turn an entrance into an occasion. Here are five remarkable examples.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL GEORGE V, PARIS

At this Parisian landmark, floral artistry makes the first impression. Jeff Leatham’s spectacular arrangements transform the lobby into a living gallery, complemented by a glamorous chandelier. The flowers invite you to pause and take in the beauty around you. For travelers drawn to romance and artistry, this is an arrival with unmistakable Parisian flair.

CLARIDGE’S, LONDON

Claridge’s makes its statement through the enduring appeal of Art Deco. Its distinctive black-and-white checkerboard floor introduces a world of Mayfair elegance. The effect is confident and composed, with a sense of occasion that never feels hurried. For those who appreciate tradition and understated glamour, arriving here feels like stepping into a cherished London institution.

The Peninsula Hong Kong

The Plaza, New York City

THE PLAZA, NEW YORK CITY

The Plaza captures the pleasure of a grand New York arrival. At the center of its lobby, the Palm Court brings together soaring palms, an impressive stained-glass dome and the ritual of afternoon tea. Beyond the city’s busy streets, this setting invites you to settle in and savor the occasion. A weekend suddenly feels like an event.

RAFFLES SINGAPORE

Natural light pours through soaring skylights into the Grand Lobby, where original Victorian pillars frame a gracious setting for afternoon tea. The proportions give the room grandeur; the light gives it warmth. Raffles offers an invitation to slow down, take a seat and enjoy the atmosphere of a hotel whose history is part of its appeal.

Claridge’s, London

THE PENINSULA HONG KONG

At The Peninsula, the lobby is a destination in its own right. Golden balustrades overlook the space, while a live strings quartet accompanies the hotel’s celebrated afternoon tea. It’s easy to imagine lingering here long after check-in. For travelers who treasure the rituals of classic hospitality, this is a particularly memorable welcome.

Each of these hotels expresses luxury differently. Finding the right one means understanding what makes you feel comfortable, cared for and excited to be there. At The Elegance of Travel, that is where our work begins: with your preferences, your expectations and the details that matter to you. That same philosophy inspires the launch of **The Elegance Hotel Reserve**, our private hotel booking membership.

CONTINUED ▶

Created for travelers who appreciate beautiful surroundings and gracious service, the Reserve offers the freedom to arrange a hotel stay whenever inspiration strikes. Members receive private access to vetted hotels through an online reservation platform available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A spontaneous weekend, a last-minute getaway or a hotel stay for an upcoming business trip can be reserved at your convenience. Members can also access eligible preferred rates and benefits on select stays. Depending on the hotel and qualifying offer, these may include breakfast, dining or spa credits and room upgrades when available. The specific inclusions are shown before booking, so you can see what your reservation offers. Our Elite clients enjoy complimentary access to the platform. When your plans call for a more involved itinerary or special arrangements, Shelley remains available to discuss a personally designed journey.

Please accept this as your private invitation to explore The Elegance Hotel Reserve. Contact Shelley Benitez at The Elegance of Travel to learn about joining—and begin imagining your next "I've arrived" moment.

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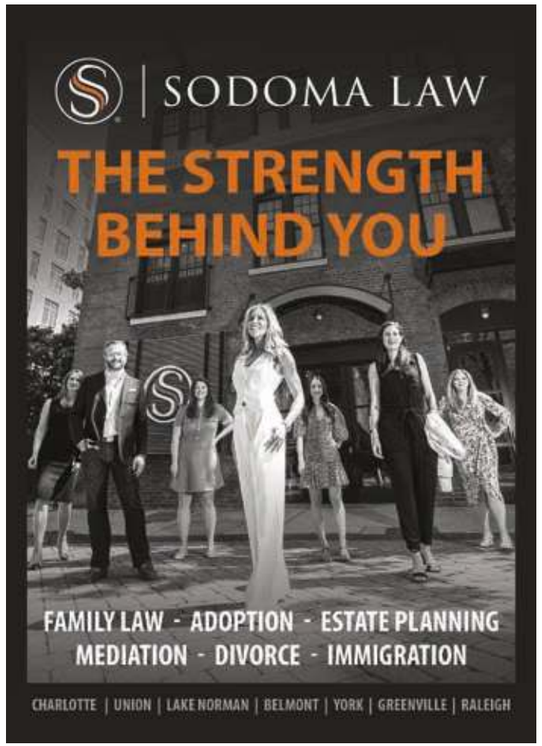

Juiced Fuel

BRINGING THE GAS STATION TO YOU

Brother-and-sister team Jeff Hanood and Kelly Wells introduce a convenient new way to fuel up in the Queen City.

Imagine never having to make another trip to the gas station. No waiting at the pump, no detours on the way to work and no worrying about running on empty. Thanks to Juiced Fuel Charlotte, that convenience is now available right in your driveway.

Led by longtime Charlotte resident Jeff Hanood and his sister, Kelly Wells, Juiced Fuel Charlotte is a mobile fuel delivery service that brings gasoline directly to customers' homes and businesses. With a few taps on an app, drivers can schedule a delivery and have their vehicles fueled without ever visiting a gas station.

For Jeff, launching the business represents both an exciting new chapter and the realization of a longtime family dream. "We always dreamed about starting something and growing a family business and here we are!" he says.

From the Classroom to the Driveway

Jeff's path to entrepreneurship is a little different from that of many business owners. A retired schoolteacher and coach, he spent his career emphasizing preparation, character and putting people first. Those same principles now guide his approach to Juiced Fuel.

Hailing from Franklin, VA, Jeff moved to the Charlotte area in 2000, initially settling in Pineville when Ballantyne was just beginning to develop. Over the years, he's watched the city experience tremendous growth. Today, he and his wife and their two children live in North Charlotte. After more than two decades in the community, Jeff was ready to try something new.

The opportunity became even more appealing when his sister, Kelly, relocated to Charlotte from Maine. The siblings had talked for years about starting a business together, and her move finally made that dream possible. "It was her relocation to Charlotte from Maine that really made it possible to get together and take the leap into entrepreneurship," Jeff explains. Together, they launched Juiced Fuel Charlotte, bringing a concept that originated in Charleston, SC to the Queen City.

Convenience Delivered

The idea behind Juiced Fuel is simple: Rather than drivers taking time out of their schedules to visit a gas station, the fuel comes to them. Customers use the Juiced Fuel app to schedule deliveries at their homes or businesses. There's no need to wait until the tank is nearly empty, either. Drivers can make fueling part of their regular routine, avoiding those last-minute stops when the gas light comes on. For busy families juggling work, school, sports and other activities, the service offers a convenient way to cross one more errand off the list.

The benefits extend beyond individual drivers. Juiced Fuel also serves businesses with vehicle fleets, delivering fuel on-site so employees can spend less time traveling to and from gas stations. For companies with multiple vehicles, those minutes can add up quickly.

Jeff encourages business owners to consider how much time their employees spend fueling vehicles each month. By calculating the time required for each gas station visit and multiplying it across an entire fleet, businesses may discover a significant opportunity to improve efficiency.

A Memorable First Delivery

Although Jeff is excited about the company's future, one of his proudest moments came during its earliest days. "It has to be that first pump!" he recalls. His first commercial fueling experience involved a U-Haul truck that arrived nearly empty. That initial delivery led to an ongoing relationship with the business, which now contacts Juiced Fuel whenever service is needed. For Jeff, it was an encouraging start and a reminder that even a simple service can make a meaningful difference in someone's day.

A Family Business with Charlotte Roots

While technology makes Juiced Fuel convenient, Jeff believes the people behind the service are what truly set it apart. He appreciates the enthusiasm of the company's founders and fellow franchise owners, who share a belief in the future of mobile fueling. He also enjoys the brand's lighthearted personality, which complements its emphasis on dependable customer service.

As Jeff and Kelly continue building their business, their goal is to establish Juiced Fuel as a trusted name throughout Charlotte. For Jeff, that means applying the same values he embraced throughout his teaching and coaching career: showing up prepared, treating people well and delivering on promises. And for customers, it means one less stop on an already busy day. As Jeff enthusiastically puts it, "Let's get Juiced!"

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SKIP THE PUMP!

How Juiced Fuel Charlotte Works

For Your Home: Schedule a fuel delivery through the Juiced Fuel app and have your vehicle filled right in your driveway.
For Your Business: Keep company vehicles fueled on-site, reducing time employees spend traveling to gas stations.
For Your Schedule: Plan deliveries before your tank gets low, eliminating the stress of an unexpected stop for gas.

Juiced Fuel Charlotte

Jeff Hanood and Kelly Wells
Hours: Monday–Friday, 7 a.m.–7 p.m.; Saturday, 7 a.m.–2 p.m.; closed Sunday
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Monthly Meetup

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AC Ballantyne Hotel Lobby Bar

Date: 3rd Wednesday of each month
Time: 5:00-6:30 p.m.
Location: 14819 Ballantyne Village Way, Charlotte, NC 28277

There will be drinks available to purchase at the bar, a cozy environment and a chance to network. We hope to see you all there!

COFFEE WITH A COP

Building relationships, one cup at a time

Each month, *Stroll* joins **Coffee with a Cop**, and we'd love for more of our residents and community partners to come along. These gatherings offer a simple yet meaningful way to connect—sharing a cup of coffee while building trust and understanding between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) officers and the neighbors they serve.

Coffee with a Cop creates space for open dialogue in a relaxed setting, where residents can ask questions, voice concerns and get to know the officers who help keep our community safe. Events aren't on a fixed schedule, but updates are regularly shared via *Stroll*, CMPD Facebook page, the City of Charlotte website and the official Coffee with a Cop page.

Together, we're building stronger communities—one cup at a time.

PLEASE JOIN US THE SECOND FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH FROM 9 TO 11 A.M.

Location: Ballantyne Summit Coffee, 13743 Conlan Circle, Suite 101

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PRESTIGE CONCIERGE MANAGEMENT

WHERE DETAIL MEETS DISTINCTION

In a city as dynamic as Charlotte, time has become one of life's greatest luxuries. Between demanding careers, family responsibilities, travel, aging parents and the everyday work of maintaining a home, finding time for every detail can be a challenge.

This is where Prestige Concierge Management comes in. Founded by Charlotte native Bridgett Sistrunk, the company was built around a simple philosophy: Your home deserves more than a quick cleaning — it deserves thoughtful, meticulous care.

FROM AN UNEXPECTED SETBACK TO A NEW BEGINNING

The story of Prestige Concierge Management began after Bridgett was laid off from her longtime job in August 2025. At first, she expected to find another position quickly. But as the months passed, she decided she had spent enough time waiting for the next opportunity.

She would create her own. "I've always been a busy body. I'm always cleaning, reorganizing, doing something. I actually enjoy doing the things that most people don't like to do," Bridgett says.

That realization became the spark behind Prestige. Rather than viewing an unexpected career transition as a setback, Bridgett saw an opportunity to build a company around something she naturally enjoys — creating clean, organized spaces and providing personal service.

A CHARLOTTE STORY

Bridgett's connection to Charlotte runs deep. She grew up here and has had a front-row seat to the transformation of the Queen City. Today, Prestige serves clients throughout Ballantyne, Dilworth, Waverly, Rea Road, Sun City and surrounding areas, with additional locations available by request.

And while Bridgett is the heart of the company, she isn't doing it alone. Her daughter is one of her biggest supporters, cheering her on as Prestige continues to grow.

THE PRESTIGE DIFFERENCE

There are many cleaning services. Bridgett believes there are far fewer that truly see a home. Her strength is noticing what others overlook — the small details that determine whether a space feels merely clean or genuinely cared for.

Baseboards. Fixtures. Corners. Surfaces. The easily missed areas make a difference. And then there are the bathrooms, where Bridgett has developed quite a reputation. She jokingly refers to herself as the "bathroom guru." "I've cleaned some bathrooms that looked like they could *not* be cleaned. And I've literally renewed them," she says.

The "oohs" and "aahs" she receives after revealing a finished bathroom have become some of her favorite moments. Clients also frequently comment on the fresh scent of their homes after a Prestige visit.

For Bridgett, luxury isn't about rushing. It's about care. She doesn't believe in treating every home like an item on an assembly line and takes the time necessary to complete the work thoroughly. "I make sure I don't forget or shortchange my clients. I want to provide a *solid* service," she says.

IT STARTS WITH A CONVERSATION

No two homes — and no two clients — are the same, which is why every Prestige relationship begins with a one-on-one consultation. Bridgett walks through the home, listens to the client's priorities and learns the details that matter most before a service is scheduled.

That conversation becomes the foundation for a service plan tailored to the household's routines, preferences and expectations. "Listen carefully, be specific and don't make assumptions. That's how you actually take care of someone's home," Bridgett says.

WHEN SERVICE BECOMES SOMETHING MORE

One of Bridgett's senior transition clients illustrates how Prestige can extend well beyond traditional cleaning. A client contacted her when his uncle needed to move quickly into an assisted living facility after more than 20 years in the same home. The transition involved packing, organizing and clearing years of accumulated belongings under a tight deadline. The client was convinced the condition of the space meant he would lose his security deposit.

Bridgett took on the challenge, transformed the space and helped him retain the deposit. But for her, the real reward was making an overwhelming family transition a little easier.

That experience reflects what she wants Prestige to provide: discreet, dependable, thorough and personal service. Sometimes a client needs more than someone to clean. They need someone they can trust.

Behind the professional service is a woman who enjoys life — relaxed, personable and someone who loves music and loves to dance. That personality is part of what Bridgett hopes makes Prestige feel different: professionalism without pretension and service designed not simply to make a home look better, but to give clients something increasingly valuable — time, comfort, confidence and peace of mind.

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BEYOND THE CLEANING

Prestige Concierge Management also provides specialized services for different stages and occasions in clients' lives.

Special Occasions & Entertaining
Prestige offers pre- and post-event cleaning, helping homeowners prepare for holidays, celebrations, family gatherings and entertaining — and restoring the home after guests leave.

Move-In/Move-Out Service
Detailed move-in and move-out cleaning provides a fresh start for homeowners and can also help landlords and tenants prepare for final walkthroughs.

Realtor-Friendly Service
Bridgett works with Charlotte-area real estate agents to prepare listings for showings and photography and help turn properties around between closings.

When Family Comes to Stay
For visiting family or out-of-town guests, Prestige can freshen guest rooms and bathrooms, polish common areas and handle the details so homeowners can focus on their guests rather than their to-do lists.

AI in the Workplace

What employers and employees should know

BY FROSINI KIARIS, ATTORNEY, MORTON & GETTYS, LLC

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, or AI, has quickly become one of the biggest topics of conversation. Whether it's recommending a book or restaurant, scaling a recipe, planning a weekly menu or creating an image, AI has moved from being a concept of futuristic sci-fi movies to an integral part of our everyday lives.

AI has also become increasingly common in the workplace. It's being used to screen job applicants, analyze data and help employees work more efficiently. However, the most intriguing question is not simply what AI can do, but how it should be used. As the technology continues to evolve, so do the questions surrounding its use.

For employers, AI can be a powerful tool that boosts efficiency and productivity. In a matter of seconds, an AI tool can identify qualified candidates, summarize long documents, create job descriptions and explain complex concepts—including some legal ones. However, employers should not forget that AI cannot replace their own judgment or the guidance of an attorney. For example, AI can make tasks like sorting through job applications more efficient, but it can also produce discriminatory results that a process reviewed by legal counsel might have caught. Saying "the computer made the decision" will not be an effective defense. AI should be used with caution and supervised by a responsible representative of the employer.

AI can also be a valuable tool for employees. It can help employees work more efficiently and productively, brainstorm ideas and organize information. However, AI is not foolproof. Unquestioning reliance on AI can introduce errors in people's work, particularly when complex or specialized information is involved. Without appropriate monitoring, misleading or false information can make its way into an employee's work product. Employees should not assume that something is correct simply because AI said it is.

AI also creates privacy concerns. Both employers and employees need to be careful when entering confidential data or customer information into AI chatbots — and should avoid doing so with publicly available free AI tools that are not covered by a business agreement. It may not be clear where

that information goes, who can access it or whether it may be used to further train AI systems. Companies should have clear policies that address these concerns and advise employees on what they may or may not upload into AI tools.

The goal is not to avoid AI, but to use it responsibly. Whether your company needs help developing policies that provide clear guidance on the use of AI tools or identifying potential privacy concerns related to their use, our employment law team is here to help.

This information should not be construed as establishing an attorney-client relationship or as legal advice. For advice about your specific situation, please consult one of our attorneys. For more information, visit MortonGettys.com.

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Dermani MEDSPA

For Chris and Kathy Cope, opening dermani MEDSPA was really about continuing to do what they have always enjoyed most: working with people. After nearly 20 years of calling Charlotte home and building careers in customer-focused industries, the Copes found an opportunity to combine their professional experience with a shared passion for helping others feel their best.

Their journey to Charlotte began in different parts of the country. Chris was born in Corning, New York, and moved to Clearwater, Florida, shortly after birth. He attended Furman University before transferring to the University of Florida, where he earned a degree in Finance in 1992. After four years as a Financial Consultant with Merrill Lynch, Chris transitioned into residential real estate, eventually becoming president of a real estate-owned mortgage company before joining Allen Tate Company in 2007. He remained there through 2023.

Kathy grew up in Marion, Indiana, before moving to Daytona Beach, Florida, during her sophomore year of high school. She graduated from Florida State University in 1994 with a degree in Communications and Advertising. Her career included time in the wine and spirits industry with Premier Beverage Company/Johnson Brothers, followed by six years as a pharmaceutical representative. She later became a certified Pilates instructor and has been teaching for 21 years. Along the way, Kathy also worked intermittently in the skincare industry, an area that had long been a personal passion.

The couple moved to Charlotte in January 2007 and watched the Ballantyne area grow into one of the region's most dynamic communities. After years in residential real estate, Chris had a unique perspective on that growth, making Ballantyne a natural choice when they began considering their next business venture.

> "We love our team and their passion for what they do, and we love seeing our clients achieve their goals and feel good about themselves."
>
> —CHRIS AND KATHY COPE

After exploring several opportunities, the Copes chose medical aesthetics. Today, dermani MEDSPA offers evidence-based treatments including cosmetic injectables such as Botox and Juvéderm, laser hair removal and skin rejuvenation services.

For Chris and Kathy, however, dermani is about much more than the treatments. They wanted to create an environment where clients feel comfortable, listened to and genuinely cared for. Most importantly, they wanted to build a team of professionals who are passionate about what they do.

"Without sounding like a cliché, it is truly all about our team and the people," they explain. "It is the knowledge and passion they bring to the clinic each day to help our customers achieve their skincare goals."

That people-first philosophy is what the Copes believe sets dermani apart. Their team takes time to understand each client's goals rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. As part of a larger organization, dermani is also able to provide evidence-based treatments at an accessible price point—what the Copes describe as **affordable luxury**.

For anyone considering a new aesthetic treatment, Chris and Kathy recommend starting with a consultation. A good provider should listen carefully, understand a client's goals and consider individual circumstances before recommending a treatment. Certain medications, for example, can affect outcomes, while pregnancy can change which services are appropriate.

The Copes' commitment to people extends beyond dermani. Over the years, they have been involved with organizations including The Mint Museum Board, MeckEd Board, Charlotte Wine & Food, The Fletcher School Board, The Mint Museum Auxiliary and Dilworth Soup Kitchen.

At home, family remains at the center of their lives. Their sons, Collin and Brendan, are both students, and the family also includes Henry, their eight-year-old red Australian Labradoodle, affectionately known as "Kathy's boyfriend."

So what gets Chris and Kathy excited about their work each day? "We love our team and their passion for what they do, and we love seeing our clients achieve their goals and feel good about themselves."

For the Copes, that's what dermani MEDSPA is ultimately about: helping people feel confident, cared for and good about themselves—one client and one relationship at a time.

dermani MEDSPA
Ballantyne - Charlotte

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- **Weddings** – Share the love! We'd love to feature photos from fall and winter weddings in our community.

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resident business guide

This is a current list of business owners and professionals from our neighborhood. It is an opportunity to network, qualify and potentially build a business relationship with other successful individuals who also live here. To be included in the Resident Business Guide, email your name, business name, phone number and email address to Ashley.Grimm@n2co.com.

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