

# From CHURCH CAMP to CHIC

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BILL O'NEILL



“It was just an empty shell of a building when we first saw it 15 years ago,” says Judy Hand as she gestures around her elegantly decorated home on Lake Gaston. “It had a concrete floor and little cubicles up stairs.” The building was originally intended as a church camp for children. The adult counselors were to room on the second floor and the kids would spread their sleeping bags out on the first floor. The church ran out of money before completing the project and the building lay dormant for three years. Enter the Hands...

Before retiring last year, Bill and Judy



Hand were the owners of the Home Bazaar chain of stores, formerly named The Dollar Store. They owned a small place on Lake Gaston and commuted to their main office about 30 miles away in Roanoke Rapids. Bill says, “We lived

discovered that the lot wasn’t large enough to do what they wanted. They had their eye on a lot next door but it was sold before they could get it. Judy wanted a new home and not one that someone else had designed so when

there for about four months of the year, and in the summer we moved to Lake Gaston for four months, and the last four months we traveled the world on buying trips for our stores.”

Judy was always jealous of the people she knew who lived on the lake full time. She talked Bill into selling their home in the city and expanding their small home on the lake. They soon



agent showed them around and she saw the unfinished shell of the church camp she knew it was going to be their new home. "I filled a legal pad with drawings and floor plans that same night," she says. "I knew we could make it work."

It did work and now their home with its wide-open floor plan is now one of Lake Gaston's showplaces. It took some doing – building a three-car garage, several extensions to the basic shape of the building, a heated pool surrounded by a large deck, and a double boat-house with two levels of sun-deck on top. Windows and more windows highlight the reason for living on the water and the second floor master bedroom features a panoramic view with sunrise and sunset included. The large deck surrounding



the pool features a field stone chimney reaching the height of the home and its working fireplace is a great place to gather on cool evenings.

The Hands use their 25-foot \_\_\_\_\_ pontoon boat several times a week during the warm weather. The sounds of "Happy Birthday" or "Happy Anniversary" songs can frequently be heard ringing from a group of friends or relatives as Bill and Judy treat them to a special occasion on the water. Sunsets are another favorite time to enjoy a quiet ride on the lake. "There's nothing like watching the heavens turn that special shade of pink as the sun sets over the horizon," says Judy.

One of our favorite times together is to go out early on a Sunday morning," Judy reminisces. "We pack some coffee,

orange juice, boiled eggs, grits, cheese, and sausage along with some homemade biscuits and head out onto the lake before the weekends get started with the watercraft. It is so peaceful out there as we read our Sunday papers and drift across the early morning water."

The large kitchen located just off of the deck is Bill's kingdom. He describes himself as a "Trained Amateur Chef." He became interested in cooking when he lived off-campus while attending college at \_\_\_\_\_ and never stopped learn-



ing. He has taken many cooking courses from famous chefs and has written three cookbooks with one in the works

Now that they are retired, both Judy and Bill spend much of their time volun-

held in the Hand's kitchen.

The 12-foot high ceiling in the kitchen features floor to ceiling cabinets, a huge pantry and spice room, and built-in television sets for viewing recorded cooking

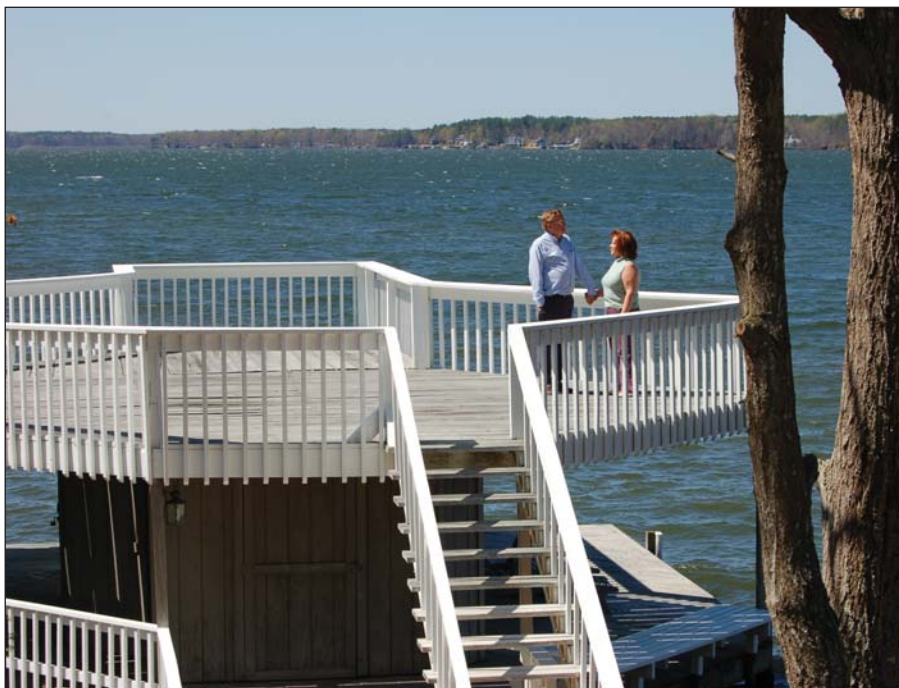
teering at the Lakeland Arts Center, a local community theatre. Judy has acted in over 30 plays and musicals and Bill is a member of the board of directors. He also prepares gourmet meals, on a reservation only basis, on the opening night of the theater's shows. The theater produces eight shows a year so he keeps busy and many cast parties are



recipes. A functioning “field hands” sink occupies a prominent location in the kitchen and is used for everything from chilling wine to icing salads and is a perfect place for setting up an ice cream bar during cast parties. The central feature of the Hand home is a cast iron, curved stairway and balcony that once graced the lobby of a French hotel.

Judy is the consummate decorator and the stairway is always decorated in seasonal or holiday motif. During the Christmas season, each step has an angel doll sitting on it and Judy calls it her “stairway to heaven.”

Judy wanted a formal dining room when she designed their home but she



couldn’t find room for it until the stairs were installed and she realized that the perfect space for it was under the gracefully curving stairway. Clever uses of space and eclectic materials are what

make this home most special. “We bought the green ceramic roof tiles in Louisburg, NC at a reclaimed tile place that said they came from an insane asylum. That may tell you something about us,” says Judy, with a laugh.

“We’re not finished yet,” she continues, “Bill wants to enclose the screened in porch and install a real gourmet kitchen complete with all of the appliances and professional cook stove. That means we will have to build

a new screened in porch and I have some great ideas for that.”

What better place to make plans and chew on ideas than on the deck watching another glorious sunset on Lake Gaston?