



The Best Things in Life Come in Pairs

With two boats, two homes and two sons, Vann and Sandy Pair have doubled their fun.

BY OGI OVERMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Theirs is not a story for the cynic, the hard-hearted or the skeptic. In fact, if a Hollywood scriptwriter were commissioned to turn their life into a boy-meets-girl love story, he would likely reject it as being too saccharine, too pat, too idyllic, too unbelievable. Even their name sounds made-up.

Pair? C'mon. But it's true – every word of it. If Vann and Sandy Pair aren't the world's most compatible couple, they're surely in the running. The way they finish one another's sentences, you might think they're fraternal twins if you didn't know better. If one doubted the existence of soulmates, a conversation with this pair of Pairs will make you a believer.

For starters, they were high school sweethearts, dated each other exclusively all through college, and married right after Vann graduated from Atlantic Christian College. Vann's mother owned a travel agency, Cardinal Travel Service, in their hometown of Knightdale, a small but growing cottage community just east of Raleigh, and she hired Sandy as soon as she graduated from business school. Vann joined the firm after college and both have been there ever since.

By the time the Internet gave rise to online travel agencies such as Travelocity and Orbitz,



the Pairs had long since carved out a secure niche as corporate travel managers.

"We have customers who spend millions of dollars a year on travel budgets," reveals Vann, "and they are never going to spend that kind of

money on unmanaged programs. We have a niche of providing a value-added service that corporations need. That's the slice of the pie we've always pursued and it's still very solid."

But wait, it gets better.

Growing up, Vann's parents had a vacation home at Land's End in Emerald Isle, while Sandy's grandparents owned one in Atlantic Beach. "We were very fortunate to spend many weekends there," says Sandy, "so I think that love for the ocean has been with us from an early age." Vann then picks up the thread, adding, "I think it evolved from there. Being in the travel business we're always talking to people about their vacation plans, and so much of that revolves around the beach, it's just a natural thing for us."

So natural, in fact, that Vann's love for all things nautical resulted in his becoming an accomplished sailor early on. He has been a boat owner virtually all his adult life, the Pair mini-fleet currently consisting of a 16-foot Boston Whaler and a 28-foot Carolina Classic. The Whaler is docked at 70 West Marina in Atlantic Beach and the CC 28 at Radio Island Yacht Club.

"I just bought the Carolina Classic in March, from Terry Davis at Town Creek Marina," he discloses. "It's a diesel, inboard, and we painted the hull green. It's the third Carolina Classic we've had and the third boat we've bought from Terry. He's a quality guy, a great guy to do business with."

Then it's Sandy's turn to pick up the con-



versation. "We love the islands and we love to travel, so we named it Island Traveler."

The name is particularly appropriate, for a couple of reasons. The second week of May, Vann and son Keith, a rising sophomore at UNC Wilmington, (their younger son Reid is a rising 9th grader at Ravenscroft, a private school in Raleigh) took the boat from Beaufort to Bimini, in the Bahamas, with overnight stops in Charleston, Jacksonville and Ft. Lauderdale.

"We had a great time," smiles Vann. "Did some fishing and hung out at the Big Game Club down there and then flew back."

Of course, Sandy put her spin on it, adding with a grin, "Keith had just finished exams, so father and son decided to have a little bonding experience and take this trip."

The Island Traveler moniker fits for another reason, as the Pairs have purchased a lot in the Abacos, a string of islands in the Bahamas, where they eventually plan to build a home.

"Our goal is to retire there," says Vann, "so we went ahead and bought the land. We just love it down there."

The Pairs found another connection between the Caribbean islands and the Carolina coast.

"There's a little secluded island, a national park on North Sound in Virgin Gorda that's called 'Prickly Pear,'" explains Sandy. "So we decided to call our cottage at Atlantic Beach ... 'Prickly Pair.' It was just too good to pass up."



The island theme, in fact, seems to run through many of the couple's endeavors. In 1997 they bought a lot in Atlantic Beach three rows from the ocean and in 2000 built a 2300-square-foot vacation home on it.

"Because of our travels to the Caribbean and the Bahamas it has the look of a little Caribbean cottage," describes Sandy. "We painted it yellow and it has a tin roof and different colored Adirondack chairs in front. When people see it they automatically think 'Caribbean.'"

Plus, Vann made sure they think 'Caribbean' when they see the inside as well. For Sandy's 40th birthday he commissioned artist Kyle Highsmith to paint a picture with the house being the focal point.

"So now we have a painting of the beach

house in the beach house," he laughs, adding, "Kyle's from Raleigh but his coastal scenes are recognized throughout eastern North Carolina. I think he's one of the best coastal scene artists around."

Clearly this couple has accomplished much in their 23 years of marriage. But more importantly, they've done it the right way, by being fair, ethical and playing by the rules.

"We realize we are blessed and we don't take anything for granted," says Sandy sincerely. "We live life to the fullest each day and try to take the moral high ground and do what's right. We're both on the same page."

And, as if to prove the point, Vann adds, "It sounds like we have this dream life, but if you walk into our office during the week you'll see we work hard for it."

Sandy's turn: "We have a pretty stressful work week and that's why we go to the beach so often. It's our escape."

Lest one think the Pairs use their boats and Atlantic Beach property as an occasional, in-season-only respite from the pressures of owning a 40-person travel agency, think again.

"We go down between 40 and 45 times a year," notes Vann. "It's 144 miles from Knightdale and takes two hours and 40 minutes, but once we get there ..."

Sandy interjects, "Vann and I always say, when we hit the top of that Atlantic Beach bridge and look out over the ocean, a big weight comes off our chest. We're home." 🐾