LAURA DOUGLASS / The Pilot

Author Mary Jane McKittrick holds a few of her books while visiting the Weymouth Center.

Children's Book Series Delivers More Than Tales

BY LAURA DOUGLASS
Features Editor

An energetic and loyal pup, Boomerang and his pal Halley's Comet are the perfect companions for an adventure on a hot summer afternoon. Based on author Mary Jane McKittrick's real life childhood pets, this Australian shepherd and feisty feline are the main characters in her award-winning book series, which forms the foundation for Shady Pines Story Town.

McKittrick created the multimedia platform as a digital sanctuary for children, ages 6 to 9, to explore day-to-day life and its challenges. Using human and animal characters of different ages and backgrounds, this fictional community demonstrates problem solving by working together: conversation rather than confrontation.

"This is a vehicle, a device, a message system — however you prefer to think of it — that is easy for parents and kids to use," McKittrick says. "Children love the pictures, and the stories are a conduit for families to talk about tough topics, like values, in a safe and nostalgic environment."

Come In and Stay a Spell

Los Angeles is a long way from Southern Pines, and this is where McKittrick's own story begins. Growing up she loved the theater and after college, worked in a television production studio

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Our Founding Fathers Might Like it Here

Maggie Beamguard
Columnist

I was born into the revolutionary Spirit of '76. It was the year of the Bicentennial. It came with special quarters, commemorative plates and cookery, Liberty Bell cookie jars, Ben Franklin whiskey decanters, collectible stamps, eagle-themed crewel kits.

My mother saw fit to start a collection of memorabilia for me. I even have the South Carolina license plate from 1976 that she saved.

All of that decor is finally enjoying its zenith along with other Colonial kitsch I've thrifted. From what I can tell, babies born in the year of the semiquincentennial will similarly have their own archive of artifacts: 250th currency (no pennies, though), Christmas ornaments and coffee mugs.

Over the last 250 years, we've immortalized the Founding Fathers and a few mothers on glassware and collector plates. Memorials, museums, books and documentaries may preserve their profound achievements in the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. But my novelties and knick-knacks remind me that for all their extraordinary courage and vision, these founders were also pretty ordinary.

They argued with neighbors and obsessed over gardens. They wrote letters to the editor, volunteered, organized and experimented.

They would fit right in here in Moore County. I like to think about what they would be like as neighbors.

Gen. George Washington would repeatedly decline to run for the Moore County Board of Commissioners, only to be unanimously elected. His meticulous and voluminous records would note everything from the schedule of prescribed burns to the migratory patterns of Canada geese.

Thomas Jefferson might disappear into a peach orchard to conduct agricultural experiments.

After penning "Observations Upon the Circular Conveyance of Carriages Near Pinehurst," Benjamin Franklin would become obsessed with redesigning the Pinehurst Traffic Circle. He would tinker with solar-powered golf carts on the side and find the Sandhills ideal for conducting his experiments with electricity.

Jefferson and Franklin would both serve on the Sandhills Community College Board of Trustees, with Jefferson lobbying for additional horticulture funding and Franklin championing workforce development.

Alexander Hamilton would insist on reviewing every county and HOA budget and would corner neighbors at cocktail parties to discuss infrastructure funding for N.C. 211.

Abigail Adams would have a finger in every local nonprofit while moderating a community Facebook page. Meanwhile, her husband, John Adams, would wring his hands over the deer eating his hostas.

Dolly Madison would know everyone in Moore County (and how they are related).

Betsy Ross would direct the Festival of Trees and work behind the scenes at R. Riveter.

Mercy Otis Warren — America's first great political commentator — would run a regular column in The Pilot, keeping town council officials on their toes with her sharp wit.

We can immortalize them on ceramics and in museums. But the Spirit of '76 isn't just about the past. It's our legacy to continue in each generation as citizens and neighbors. It's something to celebrate whether you are 250 years old or turning 50 or just being born.

Contact Maggie Beamguard at maggie@thepilot.com.

SCC Jazz Band

'Swingin' Come Rain or Shine'

Contributed

The SCC Jazz Band, the "Sound of Swing in the Sandhills" for over 58 years, will be "Swingin' Come Rain or Shine" on Monday, July 13. The concert will be held in BPAC's Owens Auditorium, on campus at Sandhills Community College, from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Tap your toes along with jazz and swing favorites you are sure to know, including "Gentle Rain," "Summerwind," "Come Rain or Come Shine," "Under the Boardwalk," "A Summer Place" and "Here's That Rainy Day."

The SCC Jazz Band is led by Dr. Larry Arnold, professor emeritus at UNC Pembroke and a longtime Aberdeen resident. Among the talented local musicians who you may know with the SCC Jazz Band are Rev. Dr. Paul Murphy, of the historic Trinity AME Zion Church in Southern Pines; Larry Wilson, who has been with the band for over 50 years; Rob Hill, music director at Union Pines High School and former director of the SCC Jazz Band; Chris Dunn, executive director of the Arts Council of Moore County; and Robert Dyer, owner of AMS Heating and Air Conditioning company.

SCC Jazz Band concerts are free events, open to the public. Tickets are required. Get your free tickets online at ticketmesandhills.com.

BPAC offers concessions for purchase including wine, beer, soda and snacks. No outside food or drink is permitted.

COURTESY OF ARTISTS LEAGUE OF THE SANDHILLS

Artist Jennifer Walker with her painting, 'I'm with the Band, Mustangs, North Dakota'

Winning Works Recognized During Juried Exhibition

Contributed

Each year the Artists League of the Sandhills hosts a juried exhibition, which includes the works of all members of the organization. This is the only art show at the league that is judged by a professional art authority.

Judges Sharon and Joe DiGiulio had the difficult task of selecting the winning pieces. This year's exhibit featured over 95 paintings in various mediums. Winners were named for each category, as well as a Best in Show

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Art Show

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were recognized during the opening reception.

Jennifer Walker was honored with Best in Show for her work "I'm with the Band, Mustangs, North Dakota," and also won first place in the oil category for her piece, "Fresh Coffee.

Additional award recipients were:

Oil: Second place, "Pitcher and Fruit," by Harry Neely; Third place, "Morganton Fence Line," by Mary O'Malley; honorable mention awards to "Untitled Blue & Orange," by Linda Bruening, "Done for the Day," by Vanessa Grebe and "Seeking Solitude," by Jane Maloy

Watercolor: First place, "Smartie Pants," by Laureen Kirk; Second place, "Spill the Tea," by Suni Ortiz; Third place, "Ponderosa Pine Bark 1,Yosemite National Park," by Cathy Mazanec; honorable mention awards to "Cadgewith Boat House, Cornwall, England," by Laura Easton, "Let's Play," by Suni Ortiz

Mixed Media: First place, "Lady in Waiting," by Debbie Whitley; Second place, "Abundance 2," by Nori Eicholtz; Third place, "Woosh!," by Carol Gradwohl; honorable mention awards to "The Package," by Janis Loehr, "Circles and Stripes," by Janis Loehr

Acrylic: First place, "Sidewalk Studio," by Liz Apodaca; Second place, "Playful Easy Feeling," by Leslie Bailey; Third place, "Shared Solitude," by Carol Rosenberg; honorable mention award to "Tangled Up in Blue," by Nancy Crossett

Other Media: First place, "Stillwater Reflection," by Barbara Ainsley; Second place, "Dreamy Landscape," by Pam Griner; Third place, "Blues," by Laureen Kirk; honorable mention award to "On the Porch," by Jane Mohr

Pastel: First place, "Dune Melodies," by Leigh Lassiter; Second place, "Emergency," by Ashleigh Corsino.

The Artists League of the Sandhills is a nonprofit organization founded in 1994 to promote interest in the visual arts by providing art education and a friendly environment in which to work, exhibit and sell members' artworks. The gallery is located at 129 Exchange St., in the old Aberdeen Rockfish Railroad storage terminal. Regular gallery hours are Monday through Saturday from 12 to 3 p.m.

For information about classes, workshops and gallery exhibits, call (910) 944-3979 or visit online at www.artistleague.org.

McKittrick

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before shifting to a career in front of the camera. McKittrick cohosted PM Magazine then worked as a morning and noon news anchor and, later, as a health care reporter and corporate communications professional. She eventually moved to Moore County, where she lived on a horse farm for two decades.

One day while helping a friend in the barn, McKittrick was chatting to herself; making up stories about the animals she was working with and told in their own "voices." Her friend was totally amused and encouraged her to put her imagination to pen and paper.

McKittrick first created Brookstone Farm, a place of healing for animals. Soon she campe up her main characters, Boomerang (Boomer, for short) and Halley's Comet, a dog and cat adopted by Harold and Edna Sanders, a childless couple. Organically, as each book was written and this fictional world expanded, the tight-knit community of Shady Pines was born.

"I have not found another children's project quite like it," McKittrick says.

Each of the Boomer and Halley books use a "PAWSitive" approach to learning. Instead of a long moral at the end, the stories include four life lessons that are embedded in the story. Each is marked by a paw print on the page. The idea is to create a natural place to pause, where parents and children can stop and talk for a few minutes about the topic at hand. The stories emphasize honesty, manners, respecting property, sportsmanship and similar values, with the overarching goal to provide an interactive environment to discuss life lessons.

North Carolina artist and illustrator Bob Ostrom brought McKittrick's vision to life with colorful images that harken back to a bygone era. And her own media savvy in marketing and news presentation encouraged her to think big.

"I am not stuck in one lane," she says, noting the Shady Pines Story Town includes not only books, but the online community with activities for kids, as well as the Kindness Connection Blog and videos.

"It's sort of like Mrs. Rogers Neighborhood. In a time of unrest and uncertainty, this is a place that is safe. The stories all come to a happy ending in this small Southern town of Shady Pines," McKittrick says.

This summer, in particular, has been a busy one for McKittrick. She spent a week participating in the Weymouth Center's Writers-in-Residence program, and relaunched her original Boomerang and Halley book series as eBooks on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. She also is working on a back to school package for Montessori schools called PAWS4 Kids.

LAURA DOUGLASS / The Pilot

Mary Jane McKittrick works on the Shady Pines Story Book website.

"It has been a full circle experience. Coming back to Southern Pines reawakened the passion that I have for animals, stories and the diversity of the population and artistic nature of this place," she says.

McKittrick's recent weeklong stay at the Weymouth Center coincided with their Derby Week fundraiser for the Weymouth Equestrians.

"I picked this week serendipitously, but it was like the universe was saying, 'Hello, Mary Jane. Are you getting it?' And my answer was an enthusiastic, yes!"

To learn more about Shady Pines Story Town and the Boomer and Halley book series, visit shadypinesstorytown.com.

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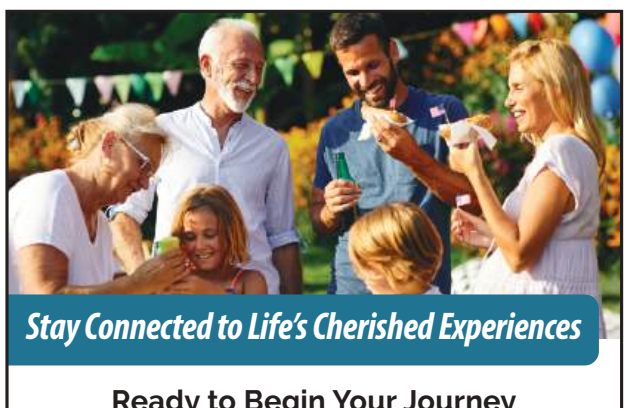

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