



VINSON HALL

CAMPUS NEWS & VIEWS

CEO Corner

Embracing Change While Honoring Our Legacy

This year, three branches of our military – the Army, Navy and Marine Corps – celebrated their 250th birthdays. I was honored to attend two of the celebrations hosted by our residents – one for the Navy and one for the Marine Corps – that commemorated these birthdays, and I was reminded of the importance of history as we look toward the future at Vinson Hall.

We on the Vinson Hall's leadership team look forward with eager anticipation and excitement to what's to come for our community. Vinson Hall, like every senior retirement community, is shaped by the people who built it, by the team who work here every day, by the residents who call it home. From the beginning, Vinson Hall's mission was rooted in service. When we opened our doors in 1969, this community – conceived by the Naval Officers' Wives Club and established by Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation – was created to provide a place of dignity, security and friendship to retired Naval officers and their wives. Today, many of our residents or their spouses dedicated years of service in their careers to the military, or to government agencies, making our shared history deeply imbued with commonly held values.

When I first stepped into the CEO role at Vinson Hall nearly a year ago, I committed to the residents, staff, and Board of Trustees that we would honor the foundation of this culture, Vinson Hall's legacy, as we build for the future. Today, we continue to strive to improve our community by developing our staff, embracing strong leadership, and partnering with our residents. The goal is to ensure that all of us – residents, staff, and family members – feel a part of our community's evolution and growth.



CEO Rob Roe (center), with NMCGRF Board members Michael Browne, Allie Leslie, CFO Rick Mazza and resident Board member Bill Morris.

As we begin to build the next chapter of Vinson Hall's history with project RISE, we want to offer reassurance, clarity, and most importantly, peace of mind. This evolution is all about enriching and protecting our legacy. We are thinking long-term to strengthen programs, services, improve space, and ensure that our community thrives for many years to come.

Most importantly, we hope all those in the Vinson Hall family take comfort in knowing that while change is happening around us, our community is surrounded by stability, care, and people who truly value our past, present and future. At Vinson Hall, as we celebrate 56 years of history, we see a future for our community that is brimming with optimism, excitement and a strong sense of purpose.

— Rob Roe, President and CEO

Sweater Weather at Vinson Hall

As the weather cooled off, Vinson Hall got busy! CARE (Community Area Refresh and Enhancement) renovations started in September and our community responded with resilience. Activities were moved to temporary locations but we continued to gather and commemorate the good times together! In September, we went back to the frontier and enjoyed the chance to kick up our heels at the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation's *Silver Spurs Soirée*, the annual fundraising gala. Then in October we celebrated the 250th birthday of the U.S. Navy at a campus-wide event. We tested our wits at bimonthly Trivia Happy Hours and celebrated milestones at every Birthday Tea. Eleven residents visited neighboring Chesterbrook Elementary School to talk to students on Veterans Day. On campus, we honored our veterans with multi-stage celebrations, starting with a Birthday

Tea, followed by a Corn Bag Toss Tournament and concluding with live music at Happy Hour. We also showed off our artistic talents at our Community Art Show in November, which boasted some 230 original works of art and was open to local students and resident families. More than 250 people visited over the two days! All in all, it was a great fall. ❖



About Campus News & Views

Campus News & Views is Vinson Hall's quarterly literary magazine. The goal of this publication is to share stories and remembrances from Vinson Hall residents and staff. All residents and staff are invited to submit articles for inclusion. All items must be original pieces and must be submitted by the author. This publication is reviewed by an editorial committee comprised of residents and staff.

Campus News & Views is designed and edited by
The Office of Philanthropy & Engagement

Editorial Committee

Nancy McSarrow Jerry Norris
Ron Musselwhite Gene Wentz

Campus News & Views is posted online:
www.vinsonhall.org/blog/

Vinson Hall
6251 Old Dominion Drive
McLean, VA 22101

Campus News & Views Fall 2025

Inside this Issue:

Philanthropy Update.....	3
Tustumena Lake and a Leaky Boat.....	4
When 'No' Means Find Another Way.....	6
Rivers of Time.....	7
Navy Pranks: Artful Indeed.....	8
Thoughts on Perspective.....	9
Communicating with Adult Children.....	10
Opening New Horizons.....	11
The Future of AI.....	12
A Season of Light.....	13
Painting After the Curtain Call.....	14

Back cover photo by Michelle Crone.

Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation News

Fall Celebrations

Ah, the fall! 'Tis the season of celebrations, and at the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation we have had so many wonderful opportunities this fall to celebrate with all of you! Kicking off the season, we were delighted to host our sold-out gala, *Silver Spurs Soiree*, on September 27. This year's fundraiser captured the spirit of the Old West – complete with blackjack tables and roulette wheels in the Silver Bucket Saloon – all a part of the fun and funds that were raised (a record \$124,000!) to support Vinson Hall residents and staff. Then on October 29, we celebrated the generosity of our Star Members (those who had given a membership gift this year of \$250 or more) at our annual *Evening with the Stars*. This is always one of our favorite events, and we were so happy to be able to thank the 140 folks who joined us for a relaxed evening of good food and good cheer.

Vinson Hall residents share a strong commitment to serving others, and it is our pleasure to help facilitate those connections in the broader community. We enjoyed bringing Potomac High Schoolers to campus for their service learning projects this fall, which culminated in a rousing session of student-versus-residents card games! On Veterans Day, it is always a privilege to coordinate resident talks at Chesterbrook Elementary School. The kids were riveted by the stories that 11 residents shared about their lives of military service to our country. Continuing the partnership with our school next door, we coordinated a joint holiday drive on both our campuses to benefit Share, Mclean's local food pantry. Students and residents came together on December 1 to assemble 70-some gift bags of donated items and write personal notes. What a labor of love!

The generosity of our residents knows no bounds, and it was deeply moving for us, in partnership with the Vinson Hall Residents' Association (VHRA), to coordinate a drive to help a staff member and his family, who lost their home in a devastating fire. As in past years, we also partnered with the VHRA in December to support their Holiday Gift Fund for staff through a grant from the Foundation's Employee Caring Fund. Many thanks to all for your generous support to our amazing family here at Vinson Hall!

Finally, as we move into the holiday season, nothing makes us happier than helping to coordinate the holiday decorating effort on campus. On December 2, more than 60 residents and staff worked together to hang ornaments on trees across campus, bringing holiday cheer to the entire community. We are so grateful for the friendship, support, kindness and generosity of this wonderful community and the donors that make the Foundation's work possible! Now that's something to celebrate! ❖



From left: Jean Mertz, Senior Director of Philanthropy and Engagement Michelle Crone and Sally Russell at the Evening with the Stars event in October.

— Michelle Crone, Senior Director of Philanthropy & Engagement

Tustumena Lake and a Leaky Boat - Part 1

By John Stockman



Image by cassie1972 from Pixabay

"This is grizzly bear country. I wouldn't sleep in any backpack tent if I were you." That advice was offered by a local, weathered Alaskan resident to me and my bowhunting companions, Carey and Clarence, when we told him we planned to hunt black bear and moose in the area.

He told us there was a cabin about three miles up the mountain in the National Moose Range that was open to the public. The cabin had been built by a prospector who was later killed in a plane crash. The Alaskan sourdough then graciously offered us his ancient rowboat to cross the glacial stream to the trailhead opposite his cabin. I remember thinking that the boat must be as old as its owner. Exposure to the elements had taken its toll on it.

My hunting partners and I had hired a bush pilot to drop us off and pick us up 10 days later on Tustumena Lake on the Kenai Peninsula. Tustumena Lake is about 25 miles long and six

miles wide. It is fed by Tustumena Glacier, a fact that later became very apparent to me.

After an arduous climb carrying our backpacking equipment, bowhunting gear and 10 days of food, we located the cabin. It was a sturdy structure with two bunk beds, a couple of chairs and a wood-burning cook stove. The cabin overlooked a small, scenic lake. I could readily understand why someone had built a cabin there.

We spent the first day glassing with binoculars and a spotting scope from a vantage point near the cabin. We saw mountain goats on distant slopes and moose nearer the lake. The area near the lake was heavily wooded and interspersed with many marshes.

Small game was plentiful. On a few nights we supplemented our freeze-dried meals with squirrel and grouse. One day while crossing a feeder stream, we saw fish at the confluence

of the tributary and lake. We decided to fish there the following day. The fish were Dolly Varden trout (technically char). In a few minutes we caught enough fish for a meal. Within an hour we were eating them. They were a huge improvement over our backpacking food. On several days thereafter, we stopped at the feeder stream enroute to the cabin and caught our supper.

We saw moose and black bear nearly every day, but getting within bow range and having an ethical shot was difficult. The bears usually winded us and the moose usually heard us. A highlight of our day was discussing our individual encounters after dinner.

We spotted a huge bull late one day and decided to hunt him the following day. We awoke to heavy winds and driving rain. All of us were thankful to be in a snug cabin rather than in backpacking tents. At about noon, the wind and rain subsided and we climbed to our lookout point and began searching for the bull. We soon located him with a cow at the edge of a small clearing. The wind was in our favor and we had a covered approach. We quickly closed the distance to about 50 yards and ran out of concealment.

It was Carey's turn for a stalk. Clarence and I remained in place concealed by brush while Carey belly-crawled closer. We watched him get to about 15 yards and raise to his knees to shoot. Before he could release, a young bull that none of us had seen rushed between Carey and the big bull. The dominant bull and his cow fled across the clearing and disappeared. So close, but that is bowhunting! Our mantra is to see how

close we can get to our quarry rather than how far we can shoot.

One evening as I was returning to camp, I nearly bumped into a black bear sow and two cubs in the thick underbrush. The sow immediately huffed a warning to her cubs. The larger one

We spotted a huge bull late one day and decided to hunt him the following day. We awoke to heavy winds and driving rain. All of us were thankful to be in a snug cabin rather than in backpacking tents.

streaked to the nearest tree and climbed it. The smaller cub didn't move until the sow cuffed it and sent it sprawling. When it stopped tumbling, it began squalling and quickly joined its sibling in the tree. The sow then turned her attention to me. I didn't like what I saw. She began swinging her head from side to side and snarling. I felt adrenaline surge through my body. The protective mother charged but stopped a few feet from me. If her intent was to intimidate me, she succeeded admirably. I began to slowly back away from her. I wanted her to know that I was no threat yet not move so quickly that I would trigger her impulse to pursue. After a few tense moments, she called her cubs and they disappeared into the brush. I stood there in the growing darkness to allow my heart rate, blood pressure and respiration to recede. ❖

The conclusion of this story will appear in the Winter 2026 issue.

When 'No' Means Find Another Way

By Jerry Norris



Jerry Norris as a flight student at University of Illinois Institute of Aviation where he earned a commercial pilot's license.

I was discharged from the Army in May 1955. I wanted to attend college. But, having spent my formative years in an orphanage where the educational curriculum was focused on Religion, Civics and History, I was poorly prepared. I filled out an application for entrance to the University of Illinois in Urbana. Within a few days, I received a rejection. I called the Dean's office at the University and sought a personal interview. But his secretary would not put me through, saying, "Look, you got his letter and that's all you will be getting." Not satisfied, I drove 180 miles to the university from Chicago and presented myself at the office. Again, the Dean's secretary turned me down flat, even though I was now standing in the Dean's Executive Office, commenting a bit too roughly: "You got all you are going to get from him."

My father had once told me that whenever someone says "no" to a request you are making,

that actually means "find another way." So, I went into the hallway alongside the Dean's office and surveyed the area. A useful experience from my Army days came to mind. We were taught to look for "choke points" on an enemy's advance. That is, at what point would he have to pass. Right across from the Dean's office was a bathroom. I reasoned that at some point he would have to use it. I went in and waited. After some time, he did indeed emerge from his office and entered the bathroom. I gave him a decent time before introducing myself. He immediately recognized my name, saying, "You sure are persistent. You won't go away until I do something, right? Come into my office!" His voice was firm and frigid. I followed him back to his office. Without any introductory comments, or the offer of a chair, he said: "I will admit you next month. If you get a 4.0 grade point average for one semester you can stay – and you promise to leave me alone when you fail to make it." I

promised. Thankfully, in his haste to see my back going out the door, he failed to notice that I hadn't taken the SATs!

At fall semester's end, though, my grade point was only 3.6 for 19 hours of credit. Dejected, I asked for an appointment with the Dean. This time, it was granted without delay. I thanked him for giving me the opportunity, apologized for not making the grade, and said I would be on my way. Before I could finish, he broke in, saying, "What are you talking about? I never expected you to get a 4.0 grade point average. You can't be serious about leaving the University!" I was taken aback. His friendly outburst was totally unexpected. Recovering, I said as evenly as possible that I was firm in my intention to leave. He asked, "Why? You have proven to me that you are qualified. Why do you now want to leave?"

His demeanor was fatherly, inviting an honest exchange. I told him that a deal is a deal, and thanked him for giving an unpromising student a break. I went on to say that others like me would undoubtedly appear at his door someday in the future and I wanted them get that break...if they could keep their word.

He said nothing and he looked at me. After an uncomfortable pause, he said, "OK. But you come back after one semester. As of now you are admitted for the Fall Class of 1958. Be there!"

We parted on very friendly terms. Due to a lack of funds, I worked one semester, then attended classes in the second semester, and repeated that sequence until I earned enough credits to graduate in June 1961. ❖

Rivers of Time

By Margaret Dean

Closer, closer towards the end of day
— our souls stand ever more alone.
— The deeper we see into each other
— the more we become our own time keepers.
Plunging into that river of endless time.
We seek to make each moment our own.
Let our foot prints march across the wash of time.
Highlighting our trail among the stars and
Erasing our foot prints from this time of floods
Seek a light of divine welcome
Before the light fades. ❖

Navy Pranks: Artful Indeed

Jack Hannon



Jack in 1963, high on the heights of Kowloon above Hong Kong Harbor, on liberty, with his ship, USS Hancock (CVA-19), appearing by his shoulder in the harbor far below.

This is the third story in a series. See A Good 'Navy Prank' Brings Much Amusement for All – Eventually in Fall 2024, and Navy Pranks in Spring 2025.

Now you have heard of the snatching of the VF-1.13 bell and its return. In the next “prank,” the tables are completely turned – the victim is US!

In the spring of 1965, we returned from a nine-month deployment to the Far East, including three months of flight operations into North Vietnam at the start of the Vietnam War. Squadron morale was quite high and now that we were “stateside,” we often took our drinking flag to the Officers’ Club on Friday afternoons and enjoyed a beverage or two in the company of those who had borne the brunt of that offensive campaign.

One day, we probably had six to eight of us in the Officers’ Club at Happy Hour with our flag proudly hanging on the wall just behind us, and our attention span seemingly began to lag after what was most likely several rounds of drinks. Alas, we had forgotten all about protecting our flag! Suddenly, we see our flag departing in the hands of an officer from another squadron, moving really fast. It didn’t take us long to realize

what was happening and some of us jumped up and gave chase.

I thought I was gaining on the guy when we got to the lobby, and I realized the game was already over and we lost. Because there inside the lobby, some 15 feet from the front doors, was a small car, engine running, guys in the backseat, each with an arm out the window, waiting for the flag to be placed into their hand. The transfer was flawless, the driver gunned the motor, and off with a definite screech out the doors being held open by other pranksters went the escape vehicle.

On later inspection, it was clear that the car left screech marks on the floor of the club lobby. (I hope they got charged for repair or replacement!) And a very artful prank it was, requiring split-second timing and at least seven officers participating (snatch team, 2; front door holders, 2; driver, 1; flag receivers, 2). And a large group of them to get the car inside. In closing, I must add that I don’t remember whether our downtrodden squadron members in attendance had to buy everyone still left in the bar a round of drinks, but among the many Navy traditions, that one seems very likely. Ugh! ❖

Thoughts on Perspective

Elisabeth Wilton



Elisabeth in a pensive moment during her 20s.

When I was young I often heard people say, "with age comes wisdom." Sadly, that does not appear to be true. Some actually grow less competent with age. If they become warped by illogical thinking, they can lose whatever acuity they previously had possessed. With my own advancing age, I have decided that the most useful thing that age can provide is perspective.

When I was young and fussed about something, my grandmother said, "One hundred years from now, what difference will it make?" Thus was the seed planted.

How we interpret what others say determines our relationship with them. What you say and what I hear may be quite different. Expectations are important as well: If I think you are critical of everything I do, I will hear criticism in everything you say, whether or not it is intended. The use

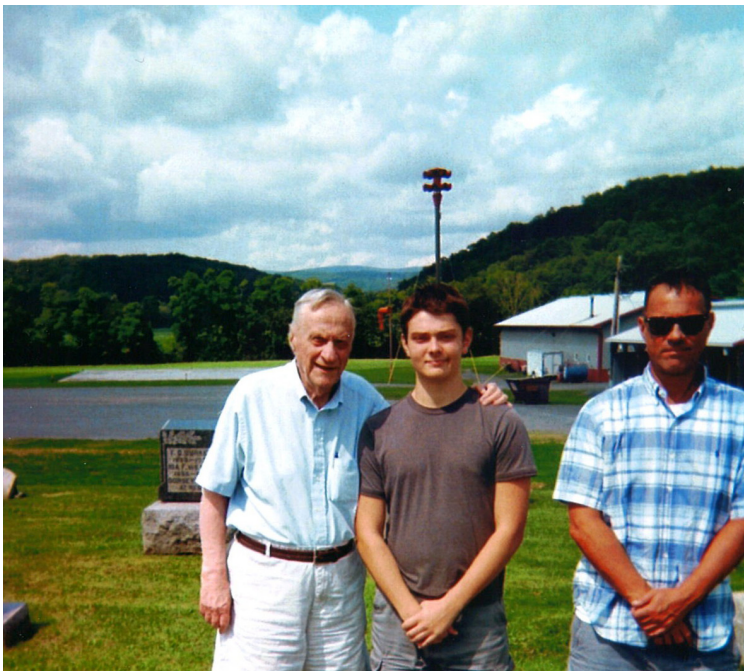
of electronic communication further complicates things, since with phone or email or text I cannot see your face and read your body language.

If I believe you to be well-intentioned (and my knowledge of you has been confirmed countless times by my own experience and the judgment of others), and you then make what sounds like a negative or hurtful comment, perspective allows me to consider it in a wider context. Instead of reacting to what I supposed you meant, I can look for how else it might be interpreted based on my wider experience.

Perspective has saved me from overreacting any number of times and kept me from alienating others, which, sadly, is what has happened on those occasions when I failed to use it! ❖

Communicating with Adult Children

By Gene Wentz



From left: Gene, Colin and Kyle Wentz

I have a group of regular adult correspondents, including a son and grandson who are at a stage in life where they can decide how much, or how little, they want to keep in touch with the “old man.”

Both my son Kyle and grandson Colin are reliable, frequent and excellent communicators, meaning they write and speak in literate passages, with the proper use of verbs, adjectives, adverbs, agreement and minimal need for the spell-checker. They inherited some of that facility from me, but their ultra literate mothers can claim much of the credit.

Our early contacts were through telephone calls, snail-mail and periodic get-togethers. The invention of the Internet, with its email component, was the single most accommodating of modern means for facilitating our keeping-in-touch.

Like most families, current events, especially in

our personal lives, largely dictate the frequency with which we now email. For example, a medical emergency, by any of us, is reason to tell the others. I pride myself in being stoic in relaying upsetting information about myself, and that quality seems to have been passed along to my offspring. I try not to burden them with stories of my aches and pains and they do the same with me.

As parents to adults, we can be trusted consultants, and we can work with our children to figure out the best way to communicate. What do they want to know? When do they need to know it? Are emails the most sensible means of communication?

For years I have written a monthly email to my children, grandchildren and other close family members. I branded it “Wassup??” and attach my recent writings for their reading pleasure. This writing initiative by me, the pushy patriarch,

usually results in feedback that is always enjoyed.

I grew up in a culture that avoided discussions about sex, politics and money. That has pretty much carried on as a family tradition. Some parents may be perfectly comfortable with sharing insights into sexual matters, but not me. And I try, sometimes unsuccessfully, to steer away from offering political judgements. But I pride myself in being an astute money manager and I offer occasional tips to my family. To

the best of my knowledge, they seem to have inherited and actively utilize this invaluable monetary skill.

Will my periodic Wentz family newsletter continue after I've gone to that heavenly Vinson Hall in the sky? Will my son and/or grandson carry on producing the chronicle?

I can only hope. ❖

Opening New Horizons

By Heather S. Mayhew

Here I am living at Vinson Hall
About to turn 90, amazing is it not, Y'all?
A year and one half is about complete
Since moving from our home on Tower Street.
Precious memories make it hard to walk away
But, look out! This new chapter is underway
Got new friends and games to play and lovely new memories to store
As we walk along this brand new shore!
Downsizing 50 years of stuff
Now that is really tough...
What I think we should keep
Charlie says just throw it in THAT heap.
To never have to cut grass or pull a weed
Never to have shrubs to haul away nor plant a seed...
No snow to shovel, no utility bills to pay
All that makes me want to holler HOORAY! ❖

The Future of AI

By Stan Trost



I was asked to comment on the future of AI. I am not a “futurolgist,” but I will try to provide some insight.

AI has been a research topic since the 1950s. Much of this research was centered at MIT and Stanford. In the last 10 years, computers have become powerful enough to allow AI to come into common use. One example: Current voice recognition systems can recognize voice commands without having to be trained on individual voices. You can speak into your TV remote and select a channel without having to know the channel number!

Vital to AI are the data centers. Many centers are located in Loudoun County. You have probably heard that these centers consume great amounts of electricity – there is active research into methods of making these centers more energy efficient. The centers have software that “crawls” the internet. The crawlers look at many sources, including on-line newspapers, magazines, social media, etc. The crawlers add information to their databases, saved on disk drives in the data centers. When you make an AI query, the AI agent uses this information to form a response to your query.

AI is in extensive use. If you apply for a new credit card, if you send a resume for a new position, if you apply for a loan, your application will be pre-processed by an AI agent.

A decade ago, programmers were in great demand, and college students were studying programming. Today, AI agents are performing many programming tasks. For example, you could tell ChatGPT to write a program in C++ (a popular programming language) to print out a mortgage amortization table and voilà you would have the table.

A program called Replit can create an app. I asked Replit to create a trivia App with 10 easy questions, 10 medium questions, and 10 hard questions. This took one minute of my time.

You can ask Claude or any other AI agent to create a website. You can make the description as extensive as you want and you will get a professional-looking website. Further, there are many websites that use AI to help with your queries. For example, you can plan a trip with TripAdvisor, and its AI agent will give you a detailed itinerary.

What about AI and education? When I was in college, we used sliderules to multiply, divide, take logarithms, and so forth. Then handheld calculators became popular. Schools were afraid to use these as they thought students would lose math skills. (They were right – just ask someone to make change!) Eventually, laptops became popular and they soon became ubiquitous.

Now AI agents can help with homework. Educators are now challenged with finding a meaningful way to allow students to use AI, and keep students learning.

How will AI impact defense and warfare? We know that drones have come into use and they are having a large role in the Ukraine conflict.

Many drones are piloted by a soldier in a bunker. Imagine that an airplane could be piloted from the ground. Warfighters would still have the lethality of an aircraft, without risking personnel.

While controversial, I believe that surface ships are very vulnerable to drone attacks. Recently, I read of attacks by swarms of drones, coordinated by an AI agent, that are attacking targets in the Ukraine conflict. I worked on the prototype of this called "Brilliant Pebbles." The idea was for a swarm of satellites to monitor for an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) attack and use

kinetic energy to destroy the ICBMs. It was ahead of its time, but now seems very possible.

Will AI cause economic disruption? Many positions are being eliminated by AI agents. Those workers affected will have to find new skills in order to stay employed. If you think about it, this is no different than when the industrial revolution eliminated some jobs, but many more were created.

I'll close with a quote from Apple Fellow Alan Kay: "The best way to predict the future is to invent it." ❖

A Season of Light

Chaplain Scott Harrison, M.Div.

December is a festive time of the year, when families and friends gather for a multiplicity of holiday celebrations. It's a time of Christmas lights, Hanukkah lights, candles in windows and on the dinner table. It's a season of light, hope and love, family and friends.

In the Christmas story, there is reference to a star in a nighttime sky and the importance of that star to certain travelers. This star led simple shepherds from their fields and wise men from the east. In the same way, for centuries sailors used the stars to guide their ships. Many people place a star on top of their Christmas tree. Even today, there remains a mystique to the beautiful stars that twinkle in the nighttime sky. The prophet Isaiah said, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of darkness, a light has dawned... For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given." However we experience God – if we believe in a God or Higher Power, we have one thing in common: We wouldn't be able to live without light. Our body needs it; our spirit needs it; our planet needs it. It's a vital source of life.

As we reflect on the Christmas story and the birth of a baby boy in Bethlehem, this child is often called the Light of the World. As we reflect on the Hanukkah story, we are inspired by the miracle of light in the Temple. Many people believe that the Light of God is in each of us and each of us is the face of God in a world in great need of light and hope.

As December and the Season of Light approaches, may we be a source of light for each other. Because our lives project ripples toward the lives of those around us, we can be a source of hope, encouragement, comfort, friendship and light for each other. We're reminded of our mutual need for light and love, warmth from the sun and each other, and our interdependence upon each other. May the Christmas and Hanukkah stories remind us of the nurturing love and light in our lives, the many small miracles that sustain and inspire us, the special people in our lives, and the light that we share with each other, each and every day. Merry Christmas! Happy Hanukkah! Happy Holidays! ❖

Painting After the Curtain Call

By Maureen Kammerer



Photo by Joe Kammerer.

The applause was very loud. People stood for an ovation when I returned to the stage in front of the closed red velvet curtain in my black nun's costume. My role as the German Mother Superior in "Lilies of the Field" was a success, it seemed.

The audience was full of supporters and friends of the Tamarack Triangle Players. But my heart was pounding hard as I felt hot tears on my cheeks. I wanted to sit down. I had two thoughts almost simultaneously; it was wonderful to experience the thrill of a good performance, but the stress of remembering lines, keeping the accent, not wavering from stage business, and fatigue from late night rehearsals was too much. I was 32 years old and this experience of playing someone else was finally coming to an end. I thought, "After tonight I will be a different artist in real life, not on a stage."

Not long after that performance, my love of sculpture and my desire to make it led me to a local well-known carver. She invited me to her backyard studio, shared her tools with me, and I began my artistic life again as a visual artist

carving a woman from a log of a gum tree. Chisels and drawings and hammers replaced the business of learning lines. It was very hard work doing this all with hand tools, but the thrill of creating overcame the tendonitis and sore muscles. Later, I used marble and soapstone to make more images. One abstract piece was carved from a piece of marble I found on the side of a street in downtown Baltimore. It had been discarded from someone's front stoop as repairs were being made. It was very heavy, but I managed to get it into the car with my husband's help. His support was physical as well as psychological as I transitioned to a visual artist.

I was thinking of projects all the time and feeling excited to explore methods and materials to make them real. Later, I discovered clay and I hired models to pose in my basement studio, and I taught others how to make their ideas a reality in figurative sculpture. The malleability, the beautiful terra cotta color and the tactile sensation of playing with clay was satisfying and fun. My adult students and I became artists exploring the third dimension. One day I

looked up at the window and the neighborhood children, including my own, had just come off the school bus and were looking in and giggling at the beautiful nude model; class had gone on a bit too long. In the summers I held classes for children and teenagers. I suppose I was still on stage as I taught and mentored, but I was me, not someone else in a play.

I had received a great gift from my father as I established this studio; he made me six sculpture stands of varying heights. Although he was a legislative attorney working on Capitol Hill, he had great interest in and talent for working with his hands. I didn't know he was making these until he presented them to me. He was not a demonstrative man, and this act was totally surprising and wonderful. I drove them from his basement in Silver Spring to my basement in Vienna, Virginia, in my old station wagon overwhelmed with his gesture of love and approval.

I am at last free to be only me and to replicate in any way I like the beauty I see in the world. Becoming a landscape painter allowed me to explore the richness of the natural world.

When I was 50, I began to see that my world of sculpture lacked the rich color of other artistic media. Even though I had learned lost wax casting and aluminum casting, I had been exploring only the shadows of the bump and the hollow.

I wanted more color in my work and in my life, and I began to take painting classes. I stood before my easel and faced the powerful whiteness of the blank canvas and did not know how to begin. I remembered Winston Churchill's friend and teacher saying to him when he started

painting with fear and concern about how to start, "Why, Winston, just do as you have always done; attack!" That is what I did too.

Thus began my love affair with brushes and paints and color and pastel chalk and linen and sandpaper and every kind of watercolor paper, and frames and mats and all the materials that one can use to make beauty and be an artist. False starts and bad endings didn't matter. It was pure fun and joy. It didn't have to be perfect, for most art is never finished, only abandoned. I abandoned many pieces while learning to paint.

No memorizing of lines or scenes to play anymore. I was at last free to be only me and to replicate in any way I like the beauty I see in the world. Becoming a landscape painter allowed me to explore the richness of the natural world. My world explodes in color now, rather than in the sound of my voice saying somebody else's words. The excitement and pleasure of creating something expressive and beautiful and tangible from a blank canvas or paper drives me on to try new media, new ways of seeing.

Now, at 85, I spend as much time as I like making a landscape come to life. I can travel to places of serenity and peace or to scenes in the wildness of nature and make them real in two dimensions. That long-ago wave of sound from the curtain call full of tension and exhaustion carried me forward to a more peaceful artistic world where applause isn't heard, only perceived.

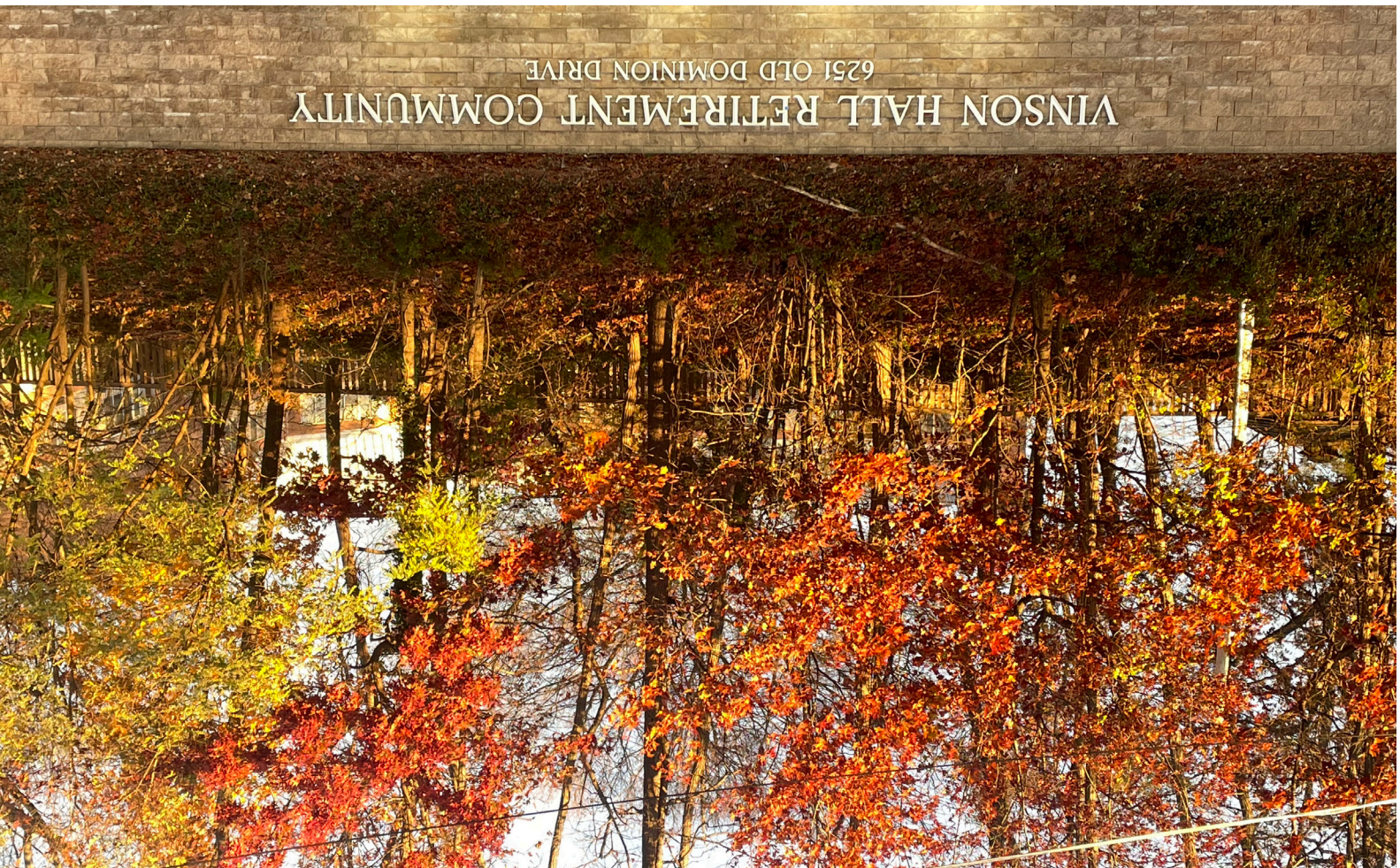
Each painting is a memoir of a rich experience. When I hang a painting in a show and someone stops and enjoys it, or buys it, they come to understand what I am saying without words. The sound of that now distant applause has receded into the silence of the past, and color bursts upon the scene for me and the viewer. It is not just a performance that will disappear into my past, but a lasting piece of art to be enjoyed by others as long as it lasts. ❖

VINSON HALL Campus News & Views Fall 2025



VINSON HALL RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

6251 OLD DOMINION DRIVE



At Vinson Hall we celebrated Fall! Clockwise from top left: Creative costumes abounded at our Halloween party; we channeled the Wild West at the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation Gala; we celebrated our generous donors at our Evening with the Stars event; and our veterans made history come to life for students at Chesterbrook Elementary school.