

An Exclusive magazine featuring the residents of Central OKC Living Communities

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Central OKC

LIVING



An Affair Of The Heart.....
the story behind it all.

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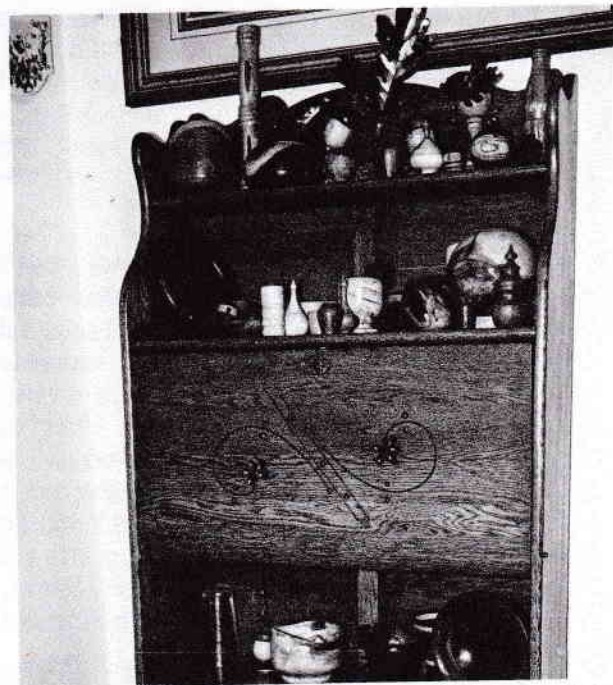
Photo by Julissa Ramirez



Connie and John Harris, leaving a legacy....

By *Ronnie Douglas* | Photos by *Julissa Ramirez*

I was always told as a child you know a good person by the feeling you get when you meet them. Well, if that's true, and I believe it is, then the Harris' are about as good as they come. I originally got an email from John and he wanted to brag a bit on Connie, so I told him I'd happily come out to the house and hear their story, and I'm glad I did. When I arrived at the Gatewood residence I instantly felt as if I were standing outside of a storybook home, something you may see in a fairytale where a nice grandparent might live. The whole street had a feel to it that made me feel safe, as if I'd taken a step back in time to my childhood when I might be arriving at a family home for Thanksgiving. Just then, a kind looking man appeared at the door to welcome us in. John had a smile on his face that was warm and welcoming and as we entered we were met by the legendary Connie Harris. Her warm smile and twinkle in her eye told me this was someone good and wholesome; someone to be trusted.





John, who is 76 now and only a year older than Connie, was actually born across the street from where the couple live now. He grew up and has lived in Gatewood, more or less, his whole life aside from a stint in the military and was not shy to tell me how it looks the same. He stated, "It's been exciting to watch the plaza build, I saw a once vibrant, wonderful community go into total disrepair and then come back to life." The two have lived in this home since 1974 and in fact, bought the house with no money down from a friend....I wish I had friends like that! The story continued to get better...

"I have always worked from the time I first had a paper route when I was 12," John says. "After college I owned Oklahoma Mattress Company until I sold out in 1981 and was a small time contractor until retirement in about 2006. I always worked and always made enough for the family to be comfortable, but when our youngest started in school full time, I asked my wife, Connie Harris, what she was going to do. She didn't have much confidence in her abilities then and said, "You mean like work for TG&Y." She started making arts and crafts, not the least of which was an old word Santa, and selling them through a consignment shop. She did really well," John explained.

From her contacts with the crafts industry, she and 7 others in similar businesses, realizing there was no venue in Oklahoma City for local artisans, started an arts and crafts show called "An Affair of the Heart." The show started at the Oklahoma City Fairgrounds in the Arts and Crafts Building with 67 dealers, and the show was not full until the 11th hour. It made a little money, and because there was not a loss, they decided to do another one and it sold out quickly and made a little more money. John told me he couldn't see at the time how this would make any money. He stated, "Connie's a brilliant business woman." He then laughed and said how wrong he realized he was. "One show, early on, I stood next to Gale Bowling, a founding partner, and pointed to the International Building, now the Pavilion, and said, "One day maybe you will be in that building," John said, then Gayle said, "One day we will be in all these buildings." I didn't say anything, but thought she was, to say the least, optimistic. Encouraged by their "success" the 8 ladies continued to do shows, expanding to two a year in Oklahoma City, and eventually into Tulsa with two shows there. Experiments with other cities included San Antonio, Louisville, and Conway, AR," said John. Gayle was right. It filled the fairgrounds.



"In the beginning everyone did everything. We cooked lunches for the dealers, marked the floors, did all the office work, and got help for moving the dealers in. It was a big job, but rewarding in every way," they both told me. "Now we are all a bit long in the tooth, and have much done by a valued and gifted staff. Working with the Fairgrounds has introduced us to many lifelong friends. Thanks to a lot of hard work and a great vision, in 2017 the Oklahoma City show was named number 1 in the nation. I knew how to work, and I was blessed with some skills, but the lady that said, "What do you want me to do, work for TG&Y?" made our lives very different. It has been a real treat for me to watch Connie grow both as a business person and as a wife, mother and grandmother. Her skills are undeniable and her dedication paid off in the best way. While slowed down by Covid, An Affair of the Heart is still going strong, an asset to the State," stated John lovingly. A little fun fact Connie told me was that An Affair of the Heart got it's name because it began around Valentines Day and was originally supposed to be for the wives and ladies who's significant others were attending the Okc Gun Show.

Another interesting thing I found out is that John's first company, which he sold to Connie's cousin in 1981, Oklahoma Mattress Company is still in business and actually produced the mattresses for the new hit movie 'Killers of the Flower Moon'. John also is a member of the Route 66 club, The Studebaker Drivers Club, and does volunteer work with the Okc Fish Hatchery, The Toby Keith Foundation and OK Kids Korral. Incidentally, the couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at the Korral and instead of taking anniversary gifts, the couple asked that donations be made and gifts given to help support the Korral and the Toby Keith Foundation.

With 3 kids, 3 grandkids, and 2 of the biggest hearts in Okc I think it's safe to say this family is still going strong, just like that famous craft show everyone knows about lol.

Thanks so much to Connie and John Harris for allowing me in your lovely home and telling me such a heartwarming tale of obstacle crushing heroism and love. Thank goodness they both went to that church camp in 1964 or we may never have gotten blessed with the legacy they created!

Until next time...

