

Beyond The *Red* Door



St. Stephen's Mr. Everything

By E. Ray Walker

Peyton Cramer is Mr. Everything at St. Stephen's. His fingerprints are all over the place, from the buildings and grounds to the electrical wiring to the kitchen renovation to the you name it. He's done it.

It's been a long and winding road for Peyton in his spiritual journey, and St. Stephen's is blessed that he is back where it all began.

As with many young Episcopalian teens in the 1970s, Peyton's faith roots started to spread at St. Stephen's. "When I was young, I was a flag bearer, crucifer (carrying the cross during the processional and recessional) and acolyte. I participated in the youth choir and the youth group (Billy Green and Harold Boyd were the youth leaders). The same things all the youth at SSEC participate in as they begin their journey with Christ."

A typical experience for many during that time. Then life happened.

Peyton explains:

"After I was married at St. Stephen's, I taught Sunday school for a while. As a family, we left SSEC in 1986 to join the folks at Little Fork Episcopal in Rixeyville. There, I was on the first vestry that was formed after Little Fork gained its status as an independent church. Along with the vestry duties, I was



the junior warden. I taught Sunday school, helped with the youth programs, and ushered on Sundays.”



“I returned to SSEC in 2009 after a bumpy marriage ride that did not end very well in 2008. At this time, my mother was spending all of her spare time, it seemed, at the church, planting her plants and taking care of the vast amount of other plants around the campus. She was getting on up in years and did not have the stamina that she used to, so she would call me and tell me to meet her at the church. We had work to do. Of course, I said ‘Yes, Ma’am’! These occasions with Mom, I think, led me to my sincere love of this church and its campus. I just want to care for it the same way my mother did, and then some.”

That extra “some” includes:

—Serving on the vestry twice since returning to SSEC, and as junior warden four out of the six years. “It is a tough job and one I dearly loved

doing.”

—The annual spring and fall cleanup programs we hold are always great fun with all the folks who show up to help. “Lots of camaraderie.”

—Had the roof on the Parish Hall replaced and will be having the Parish Hall painted soon.

—Pushing snow in the winter is always a good time.

—Rewiring the chandeliers and electrical outlets in the church.

—“Recently, Jerry St. John, Rusty Booth and I took about a month and a half to replace every single fluorescent light on the campus with new LED bulbs to comply with the Diocese’s recent Go Green program.”

—The youth area has been rejuvenated with fresh paint and new floors.

—The kitchen is getting a long-overdue renovation. “The project has been talked about since 1995; and 30 years later, we are finally getting it done.”

—A/C units and water boilers are always breaking down, usually right before church services on Sunday.

—The base of the steeple on the church is due for painting and will be done this summer.

The Buildings and Grounds committee has been involved with each of these projects. With a 200-plus-year-old church, there will certainly be many more.

“Now that I am not on the vestry, the Buildings and Grounds committee has been rejuvenated with me, Jerry St. John, Rusty Booth, Lina Frank, Elizabeth O’Reilly and our fearless leader, Billy Green, as the committee. We all do what we can do to help keep the campus in shape. We can use all the help we can get. One of my favorite sayings is, ‘Many hands make light work.’”

Peyton's life has revolved around St. Stephen's in countless ways, and the church has had a profound influence on him. He started at St. Stephen's, he left, he returned. There is still a long journey left to travel; but for now, he says:

"I love God, I love (fiancée) Vicki Linthicum and all my children, and I love this church and my church family. I think my Mother would be happy to know that I have done my best to carry on her legacy of loving and caring for St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and will continue to do so for as long as I can."



RAVES FOR PEYTON

Everyone at St. Stephen's has a Peyton story. Here are a few:

Ashton Franklin (Peyton's step-sister): "In 1980, when my father, Tom, married Peyton's mother, Betty Jean, we became brother and sister. Ironically, I had been Peyton's third-grade Sunday school teacher at St. Stephen's. I was an only child, and that day I suddenly had four brothers and a sister.

"Many years later, when Peyton moved back to Culpeper, we reconnected. Since Peyton was my only relative here in town, it was only natural that I would call upon him for everything. He is always there for me whenever I needed something — a ride to the airport at 2 a.m., plumbing, electrical, construction, you name it and he can do it!

"We have had our moments, of course. He is a truly amazing person, and I am blessed to have him as my "little brother." His favorite saying to me, which is often, is, 'JUST CALM DOWN, ASHTON, JUST CALM DOWN.'"

Cindy Rickett: "I've known Peyton for almost 20 years. Peyton is honest, sincere, has a heart of gold and would do anything for anybody. I consider him a dear friend, appreciate him immensely and wish him all the best, all the time.

"About 10 years back, I was visiting churches, and Peyton shared some stories about St. Stephen's and his upbringing in the church. One Sunday, I visited and felt a deep sense of belonging. It was like I knew this was where I was meant to return to God. I told Peyton about my visit and said I'd be back the following Sunday. That Sunday, I saw Peyton come in and walk down the aisle. He turned and looked around. I was on the left, against the wall, a few rows from the back. Our eyes met. Peyton approached me, took my arm, and said, 'Oh no, you're not sitting back here. Your place is up front with us.'"



Jerry St. John: "Just wanted to say as a friend of Peyton and a testament to his personality, dedication and sacrifice, that since I'm not really that social, or very willing to volunteer my time. But he's been able to get me to join the Building and Grounds committee, get up fairly early on Saturdays, and the odd afternoon or day of the week to do innumerable odd jobs for the church or some of his family and friends. And I enjoy and actually look forward to some (not all) of these jobs. His selflessness is boundless."

Billy Yowell: "When you think about volunteers at our church, St. Stephen's, there are a few names that stand out, one is Betty Jean Franklin and the other is her son, Peyton Cramer.

"Peyton has been a Junior Warden extraordinaire, the person that the church could, and can always, be counted on to be there, be available. His approach was and is, let's fix it before we call a repairman, always saving us money.

"Peyton and I have played lots of golf together, kidding and ribbing each other every time, 'good putt, good drive, how did you top that ball, and was that a whiff?'"

"I am lucky to have Peyton as a friend, one who is like a brother."

PEYTON AT A GLANCE

Born: February 1961 in Richmond, Va.

Parents: Betty Jean Franklin and Alfred B. Cramer III

Siblings: Three brothers (all older) and a sister (younger); one older step-sister

High school: Culpeper County High School

College: Virginia Commonwealth, 3 1/2 years, no degree. "Life got in the way."

Marriage: One. Divorced. "The current love of my life is Vicki."

Children: "Megan and Judson, and his wife, Brittany. Vicki's children are my stepchildren, Erica and Chad, and his wife, Emily. Erica and her husband, John, have blessed us with three grandchildren, Lev, Axel and Juniper."

Career: "40 years in construction material sales in Northern Virginia. Ready Mix Concrete for the last 25 years. People say, 'I am all mixed up and set in my ways.'"

Tell us something about you that no one knows: "Nobody knows that I was once a professional photographer. Ask me and I will explain why I am no longer a professional photographer."