

May 2017

WILLIAMSBURG'S

Next Door Neighbors®

VOL. 11, ISSUE 5

PRICELESS

Discovering the people who call Williamsburg home

Nature Calls!

Tom Rooks



www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com

Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Just Hard Work

By Christopher LaPointe

Lisa W. Cumming Photography

“The sacred part of what we do, our culture, I’m just that much of it,” Tom Rooks says holding his fingers less than an inch apart. “I’m the head coach, but the kids establish that culture and maintain it.” He speaks of the rowing community and the ethos of the team with reverence and respect. If anyone should have reverence for the activity, it should be the coach.

Tom comes from a family of rowers. Both his father and grandfather rowed when they were younger. However, by the time he was born, his father had stopped rowing, and his grandfather was no longer the president of his local rowing association. Though Tom did not live with his father because of a divorce, he was aware of the family tradition. Neither his father nor his grandfather pushed him to join the rowing team, which might explain why he did not start rowing until his senior year of high school.

Tom admits that his basketball and cross country skills were decent throughout high school, but neither of these sports spoke to him on a deeper level. Without feeling a strong commitment to any other sport, he thought he would give rowing a try. Perhaps, subconsciously he hoped that a shared interest could bring him closer to his father. It did not take long before he found that deeper commitment

he was looking for. The first two practices were a little difficult to process with so many things going on while on the boat. “At my third practice, while out on the water, something just clicked. I could feel my grandfather, who died when I was a sophomore. I could feel him hovering above and just behind me pushing me forward. That’s still something I feel whenever I’m in a boat. I feel that push to be worthy.”

Growing up, Tom didn’t have that much interaction with his father or grandfather because of the distance between the families. He had good relationships with each, albeit long distance ones. But this newfound passion for rowing provided him with the opportunity to have a connection back to this family. Joining the team had a profound effect on Tom’s life.

“In high school, even more than in college, I pulled every stroke like I was trying to prove that I belonged. I know that I pushed myself to be worthy of the team,” he says. His drive to prove himself on the water did not go unnoticed. His high school coach, Rick Gotham, named him the stroke seat.

A stroke rower sets the stroke rate and rhythm for the rest of the team. In essence, Tom was named a co-captain though it was only his first year in the activity. The stroke works closely with the coxswain (the naviga-

tor and de facto onboard coach) to achieve the most out of the team.

“It wasn’t so much the accomplishment of being named the stroke seat of the varsity eight. It was that the other rowers thought that I was the right guy for the job.”

He went on to row in college as well. His high school coach moved up to the college level at the same time, so Tom was able to continue to row for the same coach throughout his career. Even today, he will look back to Coach Rick as inspiration to inform the decisions that he makes.

After college, Tom joined the Coast Guard where he was able to continue to be out on the water as part of his daily work routine. But the lessons he learned from Coach Rick stuck with him so much so that he still wanted to be a part of the rowing community. He became a coach and has worked with nearly every age bracket that can be imagined. He has coached both his children and even his wife at different times throughout his career. These experiences taught Tom a few lessons when it comes to how to push without nagging.

Along the way, Tom discovered a few misconceptions non-rowers have about the community. “First off, a coxswain never has to scream the word ‘Stroke’. That’s like having a

Your dog knows it's a pill and not a tasty treat.



Does your dog have a sweet tooth? A meat lover? Nutty for peanut butter?



We can custom prepare highly palatable medication for your dog and take the “ruff” out of medicating your pet.

Call us today!

1302 Mount Vernon Ave. 757.229.3560

info@propharmacywmsbg.com

Monday - Friday ~ 8:30 am - 5:30 pm; Saturday ~ 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Modern Healthcare With The Personal Touch You've Been Missing

Remember the good old days when your physician took the time to listen to you? We're Your Local Physicians for Life!



Thomas B. Hoag,
DO, MBA



Glenn T. Rauchwarg,
DO, FFAFP



Dannette Yuiska, PA-C



Eileen B. Vernon, NP-C

LET US CARE FOR YOU • SAME DAY APPOINTMENTS

ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS

TPMG Discovery Park Family Medicine

Tidewater Medical Center at New Town
5424 Discovery Park Boulevard
Building A, Suite 201
Williamsburg, Virginia 23188

(757) 345-2071



TPMG
YOUR HEALTH. SKILLFULLY GUIDED.
mytpmg.com

cross country coach say ‘Run’. That’s what we’re here to do.” Another thing that people misunderstand is the strength involved in rowing. “People think that I must have really strong arms. I don’t. I have really weak arms. We have sliding seats, so every stroke is a leg press.” Tom does not blame anyone for not knowing more about the sport; it is an activity that has been partially surrounded in mystery in the United States. Even the name of the club is a bit misleading: Williamsburg Boat Club. The name falls in line with British use of “boating” to refer to “rowing.”

Tom also discovered that no great thing comes without a few challenges, and he has faced a few during his coaching career. “Every fall, I teach a 14-year-old how to navigate a 60 foot boat for about three weeks. Then I send him miles up the river, and I pray he gets it back safe. That’s the single most frightening thing I do as a coach,” he says. He is a competitive person, but his desire to win is trumped by his concern for the safety of the team.

When considering the role of a coach, Tom also notes the tremendous amount of empathy it takes to coach the different personalities that are attracted to rowing. Sometimes he has to be pretty intense. Sometimes, he has to cajole a reticent rower to reach his or her full potential. “I take pride in the fact that we provide a home and a community for every type of rower, regardless of what brought them here.” That sense of inclusion and community shows whenever Tom speaks about the activity. He loves the fact that there is a place for everyone within the rowing community.

Tom has identified three general reasons that bring people to the sport of rowing. It is frequently the appeal of friends who are on the team or who love rowing. This group joins to be with their friends. Another group shows up because they are athletes that really just did not fit in another sport. Tom believes this was his motivation to join. The third group is comprised of people just curious about the sport. Sometimes, they are people who saw it in the Olympics or read *The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown, and their curiosity ran away with them.

It does not matter what brings a person to the Williamsburg Boat Club. Tom and the other coaches are willing to work with everyone. He advises people to just show up. “If you’re at the boathouse, you’re on the team. We don’t have cuts.” For the club, it’s about working hard, not about having talent. He asks each team at the beginning of the season, “What do you want? And what are you willing to sacrifice?” Some of the teams are intense and competitive. Other teams are out there for the exercise or the sense of belonging. The club boasts having rowers from ages 11 to 80. Tom is pleased that the club offers a sport that people can do until they decided they do not want to do it anymore.

Despite the numerous medals he won as a rower or the medals the teams he coached have won, the respect earned through hard work and pushing yourself is what Tom Rooks sees as the real value of the activity. One day, the stroke rower of a team that he was coaching came to him and said that most of the team thought that their friend could pull an oar better than one of the members already on the team. The kid that they were trying to remove came from a rougher background, dressed differently and listened to different kinds of music than the rest of the team. Tom thought about it for a while and decided to set up a rowing test. The young man finished second in the test. “The best moment I’ve ever had coaching was when the team lined up single file and apologized to him one by one. They all learned the lesson that day that if you’re willing to work hard and push yourself, you can earn the respect of people who wouldn’t otherwise respect you.” NDN