

KALMIA LANDING: WHERE THE LIVIN' IS EASY: Midge Rothrock

One half mile north of Richland Avenue, turn onto Gregg Avenue. Follow along the road until arriving at a community which has been able to accomplish what they advertised. Kalmia Landing is a beautiful landscape area of 35 acres, made up of 144 doors. They are broken out in the following ways: 122 patio homes, 4 villas; and 12 condo apartments. There are also 6 remaining buildable lots. All 144 'units' above are privately owned. Some units are rented, and some are for sale.

The history of the kalmia in this area is well to known to many master gardeners and ardent gardening fans. This article will be instead about a group of neighbors who really love living independently, and yet somehow DO depend upon the friendships shared and community pride.



Dave Johnson is current President of the HOA, a team of volunteers whose commitment to Kalmia Landing Homeowners and Condominiums Associations is the epitome of professionalism. As President, Dave extended an invitation to visit with several residents at the clubhouse, and see why they take such pride in this highly-successful planned community, designed for people aged 55 plus.

This neighborhood is calm, safe, friendly, and beautifully cared for, where all exterior household tasks are done by professional services, as part of a monthly fee. Because of the unique way the seven cul-de-sacs and a loop traverse through the 35-manicured acres, folks pass and greet one another often. There are individual and shared gardening plots. The clubhouse is the social and administrative center, and it is abuzz with activities. One can find a comfortable main room, tastefully decorated complete with a welcoming fireplace. There are card and game rooms, a well-stocked library, pool table, lounge, fully appointed kitchen, an exercise room, a television room, as well as their own private hair salon managed by Jeff Scott, who also has a shop on Laurens downtown.

Other than the professional services which are contracted for, there is just one paid employee, Stephanie Wood. She is highly regarded. In fact, Florence Rocco, one of the residents, said with affection, "Without her, we're dead! She *knows* all." And, with her warm smile, and willingness to assist in any way, it is clear this Office manager is in a place where she is well suited.



Kalmia Landing residents pride themselves in living for and giving to the world around them. So many spend time volunteering at neighborhood, church, national or international events. The very day of this interview, resident Alan Moses had to leave slightly early, as he was going on a mission trip at 4:30 a.m., and had a few last-minute errands. Then, resident Joseph Rocco came to join, having finished his weekly Wednesday volunteering shift at ACTS. The others assembled gave Joe plenty of teasing about his time spent at ACTS, likely visiting and drinking coffee. There was a lot of good-natured ribbing and banter! In fact, they claim they laugh a lot, and everybody talks LOUD.

These folks are seldom idle. Each one seemed so alive and passionate about the joy they derive from this gentle and rewarding lifestyle. Instead of mowing lawns and cleaning outside gutters and windows, they are able to give time and talents to a myriad of interests: assisting in building homes, mentoring youth, coaching (from sports to new businesses), serving the needs of the underserved of our community and beyond, enjoying crafts and handiwork, reading, playing shuffleboard, swimming, relaxing poolside, sharing meals, and enjoying the many activities available to their centralized location. They also keep their minds sharp by engaging in on-premise training classes, from technology to painting to Bible studies. The art extends to painting with Alzheimer's patients, while techies can learn to better operate their digital cameras and other hand-held electronics, master the Internet, Skype and Facebook, enjoy the various Windows and Excel options, and even learning on-line banking. Their Speaker's Forum guest on March 5 was Aiken's Mayor Cavanaugh. Their calendars are full every day!

Kalmia Landing is near to shopping, medical offices, the Aiken Regional Medical Center (walking distance out their back fence), restaurants, the new Y, downtown Aiken, as well as sporting and fine arts events at USCA.

During the recent ice storm, PAX, these neighbors really supported each other, and actually seemed to have some fun, bringing out the best in Kalmia Landing. Many took refuge in the clubhouse where there was power, using it for several days and nights, enjoying heat, hot showers, plentiful food, and good companionship. Everyone pitched in, sharing meals from chowder, to spaghetti, chili, hot dogs, and even a daily hot breakfast. They played games, and declared an occasional happy hour. Those who had power gladly shared their hot meals with everybody at the clubhouse. 10 or 12 even had a big “slumber party”, keeping safe and secure, for three nights. John O’Connell, Property Committee, and Irv Magin, Landscape Committee, were commended for the great job they did during the storm.

Why does their community work so well? It is the people, of course. People with vision and stamina. People who care about keeping their neighborhood to the highest standards. They thrive on an active volunteer program that staffs their administrative positions and provides them with skilled and committed officers for their Kalmia Landing Homeowners and Condominiums Association. Those serving are residents, and are personally invested in the ongoing stability and vitality of Kalmia Landing. Their monthly assessment is used to fund all lawn care, other grounds-keeping needs, the common security gate, and all building and home exterior maintenance, including roofs. With foresight, they established and maintain an ample reserve fund used for capital replacements. Each private homeowner does pay for their own utilities, taxes and insurance. All are expected to uphold a Protective Covenant with each other to govern the other common facilities and shared property.

There are 18 different standing committees, handling things from the mundane like changing filters and litter patrol, to organizing social and community events.

Here are some of their stories:

Alan Moses lives next door to **The Rev. Dr. Robert** and **Elaine Hibbard**. Rev. Hibbard teased when this neighbor moved in 5+ years ago, like this: “Next door, we have Moses. Who’s next? This really is Paradise living!” Al works with their really first-rate website. Check it out at www.kalmialanding.com. With long career years with the Air Force, then Department of the Army, his career was demanding and diverse. Al wanted a place like Kalmia Landing where he “didn’t have to do anything, and had everything needed right there”. He has found great neighbors, living which is very affordable, a nice pool and clubhouse, and plenty of time to give back. In fact, during March, Al traveled with several outstanding Aikenites to Honduras, to assist with their annual trip to provide dental services.



Muriel and Bill McHugh do not mind admitting they passed the age 55 requirement some 25 years ago, when they moved to Kalmia Landing. Thanking God every morning, they say they are loving life. Bill came to Aiken in 1989, the day after Hugo struck, to join Westinghouse. Joining the “horse people” at “Up Your Alley”, he was invited to see exciting Kalmia Landing, where he rented for a time. This was an easy decision years later on where to retire. They are now serving on the Social Committee.



Florence and Joseph Rocco were born in Queens and Brooklyn, respectively, and moved “out east” to Long Island as a married couple. When visiting Charleston years ago, they had with them a brochure from Kalmia Landing which had been distributed in New York City at a housing expo. On a rainy-day trip to Aiken, and return visits over five years, they knew they had found what they wanted in retirement. While Florence worked in payroll and personnel in Suffolk County, Joseph was a driver for Air Freight. He now drives the Kalmia Landing van, while serving as the neighborhood comedian. He is very helpful to his neighbors, and obviously well liked for his wit. Flo, working as a docent at the Aiken Museum, agrees this community will really miss Elliot Levy.



Carol and Dean Scott are celebrating 20 years at Kalmia Landing. Their daughter, Diane Derico, now lives in Sumter. While she was attending an art class at USCA, she met many retired people from Kalmia Landing, and encouraged her parents to check it out. With their four children scattered, they did find this to be exactly what they wanted. In fact, Carol was President of the HOA for five terms! Apparently, Dave Johnson talked her into it a time or two, but she readily admits that she loves this community. Dean is Chair of the Social Committee. Dean seems as if he hardly ever met one, but he says when they came to the clubhouse the first time as strangers, many people went out of their way to make them feel welcome immediately. To this day, they love the security of being able to enjoy frequent travel, knowing their home is safe and secure, even if they are gone for months at a time.



Jane and Spence Grothier came to Aiken in 1979 with DuPont. As such, they saw Kalmia Landing “rise up out of the ground”, but were too young to qualify. In 2002, Spence claims their daughter and Jane “ganged up on him” with a bright idea to live here, and not be responsible for the total care for such a large home any longer. Their son is in Texas. Daughter Pat Bennington now works at SRP Federal Credit Union. Janet Page, still a resident, had a floor plan she willingly let Spence duplicate, which is now nearby. Prior to moving in, Spence worked with the travel program he coordinates, stopping in to see JoAnn Woodley in the office, and visiting with the Hibbards. Spence jumped in on a big project, when the streets in this private, gated community had to be repaved from the resources held in reserve for just such maintenance. Spence served two terms as Treasurer, after Dick Bowers retired, and has set up the well regarded Finance Committee. For Spence, it is one big happy family who call on each other.



Jack Paulus is particularly credited by Spence, who appreciates the history of what is here, and the sharp thinking of this first President. For 17 years, Jack Paulus served as President of Homeowners, bringing his strong background as a retired City Manager. When the developers were ready to turn over the community to the homeowners, Jack created the Board, to handle the transition problems. They wisely set up the reserves to maintain the neighborhood long into the future. Along with the re-paving, another example was replacing the fence, for \$100,000, another good decision for use of the reserves.

Carole Miller also served as President, for one year, and Secretary for five. She chairs the Clubhouse Committee now, working closely with Carol Scott. Sometimes, they do their best committee work looking sharp at poolside, in fact! Carole is a Bostonian by birth. She came to Kalmia Landing in 1997 at the urging of her three children, located in Columbia, to come to South Carolina. As a widow, it has proven to be a safe place, providing peace of mind, security, and calmness. Her husband, with GE, and she lived in Upstate New York. Two sons attended USC, which got them familiar with the Carolinas.



Barbara and Frank Peel are the longest residents remaining. Barbara was the first Social Committee Chair. She is much admired by the residents, even to this day. Staying active, Barbara still is involved in the ladies' luncheons.

Andrea and Dave Johnson came to Kalmia Landing in a roundabout way. Aging mother Ruth was residing in cold Minneapolis by herself, dealing with ice and snow. Sadly, she took a fall, and realized the need to be closer to family. Not wishing to return to the Twin Cities themselves, Johnsons instead purchased a condo for Ruth here. Unfortunately, Ruth took another fall, breaking a wrist this time, which required a move to Shadow Oaks, and then Cumberland Village. In 1994, Dave and Andrea sold their own place surprisingly quickly, and got special permission to make their home in Kalmia Landing, even though they were too young at the time. Over three years ago, reversing the trend of downsizing, they realized they wanted more room and moved to a patio home here, selling the condo. Dave Johnson experienced living in four other communities with HOAs. Criss-crossing this country with his career first as a headhunter, and then as a project manager for LifeTouch Directories, Johnsons quickly valued the way this association ran. He is well suited for his current role. Dave and Andrea continue to be involved at First Presbyterian Church. Andrea, (along with Carol Scott until recently) works with the handcrafted necklace ministry, among their volunteer interests. Like the others, Dave says the best part is the people, the spirit and proximity to everything one might want or need.

Visitors are welcome to Kalmia Landing. Area realtors have a very few listings as well. See their website www.kalmialanding.com for information. Take time to look at the photos, and read in more depth about the activities, including the most recent well done newsletter.