

Meet some of the neighbors at Avalon Village

Profiles excerpted from past issues of *Avalon News*

The Mighty Pens of Russ Irwin

February 2009

The next time you are looking for something useful, beautiful and unique to give as a special gift, give Russ Irwin a call. For most of his life, Russ has been a woodworker, but it was in the mid-1990s while at a woodworkers' show that Russ saw someone making handcrafted pens. His wife of 52 years, Eileen, suggested, "You could do that, Russ." Like Maine, their native Poconos Mountains home offered long winters where Russ could develop his new craft.

To date, Russ has made and sold over 3,000 pens, each one unique and with Russ' tongue in cheek "out of sight" guarantee (once they are out of Russ' sight, you're on your own). Fruit trees offer some of the prettiest and easiest wood for pen making, but he is game to try just about anything, including deer and moose antlers that friends have provided. If they are in the right condition (it's hard to tell until he gets into carving them), they make great keepsakes. A piece of wood about the size of a chair leg is all Russ needs to provide plenty of wood for a number of pens.

Some of the wood used for his pens has historical significance. For example, the USS Providence was scuttled in Penobscot Bay off the shore of Castine in August of 1779. Wood from the wreck was harvested and Russ was able to create a dozen pens from the samples he received. The deep mushroom-colored wood makes for beautiful writing instruments. Russ has also crafted pens from the stage of Symphony Hall in Boston.



When asked how long it takes to make a pen, Russ responded, "First you grow the tree, then you chop it down..." Kidding aside, Russ went out to his workshop and demonstrated. Within minutes he produced a beautiful ivory-colored pen made from a moose antler. He then asked what color metal to use for the mechanics. Thinking about how the antler came to be in his possession, the suggestion was made for "gun metal." Using his own special process, the metal was inserted into the wood and a new pen was ready to write flowing words and doodles.

The price for a Russ Irwin pen ranges from \$15 to \$45 and up, depending on the wood. He sells them mostly through word of mouth. So, the next time you're about to toss away a solid old wood chair, consider giving a leg to Russ. It just may be turned into something that will continue to be used and treasured for many years to come!

From Lobster Traps to The Bench: Gene Carter

July 2011

Gene Carter was named for his grandfather, Gene Beal, who was a lobsterman and keeper of the lobster pound on Dyer Island, off Vinalhaven. His favorite uncle, Charles, tried hard to lure Gene into lobster fishing, but after a while, Gene gave it up and chose college instead. "That work was too hard," says the Milbridge native.

Gene's father, a salesman, moved the family around quite a bit while Gene was growing up. One particular move, from Winterport to Bangor, proved to be very important to his future. "Bangor was known as having one of the top two high schools in the state, so we moved there." Gene recalled, "Dad said to me, 'I want you to prove to me just how good you really are.'" Gene became inspired by the high school education he received - and a smart young lady, Judy, "who I met on about the third day of high school."



At the University of Maine, Gene proved to his father that he was, after all, a good student. He received a Root-Tilden-Kern scholarship to NYU Law, the most prestigious scholarship awarded then. "They paid for my room, board, tuition and provided \$100 a month," he explains. "The only thing was, I had to be in the top 10% of my class and couldn't hold a job during the school year. I was allowed to run a milk route for Footman's Dairy during the summers, though."

Upon graduation from law school, Gene and Judy were married. "Then I was recruited into the military for eight months during the Cuban Missile Crisis. That was an interesting time to be in the Army."

After completing his military service, Captain Gene opened a law office in Bangor. "After being on my own for a little while, I began a wonderful partnership that formed Rudman, Rudman & Carter." When, in 1980, at the age of 44 years, Gene was appointed to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court by Governor Brennan in 1980 Fellow Avalon Villager Jerry Rudman jokingly accused Gene of abandoning him.



Three years later, Senator Cohen recommended that President Reagan nominate Gene as a US District Judge. "My secretary got a call at 11:00 one morning from someone claiming to be the President. Turns out, it wasn't a prank. I remember chit-chatting with President Reagan about Maine and telling him that I held him in high regard." On July 5th, 1983, he was sworn in as US District Court Judge in Portland, replacing Edward T. Gignoux, who had served for 26 years. Gene concurrently served as an appellate judge and trial judge in the Maine judicial system as well as serving at the federal level. "Mother always said that I was a hyper-active child. I guess I was!"

Gene and Judy raised two children together in Bangor, where Judy taught 4th grade at the Mary Snow School. When their children were out of school, the Carters moved to Falmouth. Then, when George Singal of Bangor was appointed to the federal district bench in 2000, Gene remained an active judge, taking senior status, and George moved to Portland.

One of the Carter's sons and two grandchildren were living in Bangor at that time, and Judy wanted to move back. Her wish came true in 2010, when they purchased their cottage at Avalon. Recalling their decision, Gene says, "Our friends in Portland asked, 'What do you want to do that for?', as if we were moving to the forgotten wilderness. Now that we're here at Avalon, they ask, 'What are you doing?' I tell them, 'Whatever I want to do.'" Although they enjoyed their big house in Falmouth, the Carters really love living at Avalon. "Our cottage has everything we need and it's easy to take care of because I don't have to do any work." With a laugh, Gene said, "My friends from Portland step into our new home all wide-eyed. They really like it. It's not a log cabin, that's for sure!"

Looking back, Gene said, "I got to implement a lot of laws, and I really enjoyed doing that. I'm a great believer that once you make a decision, you should move on and leave it alone."

His extensive collection of opinions are displayed at the University of Maine, in the Allain Library at the Buchanan Alumni House. There's another impressive display in the library as well – a life-size bronze bust of Gene! "I treasure the benches that I received as going away gifts from the law clerks and from Jerry Rudman," he remarked, referring to the benches set on his deck and front porch with engraved plaques, "but the prototype of my bust for the law library... well, that was a little too much to have around the house. I figured that the University could find a good place to put it," he said, chuckling.

The next time you visit the Buchanan Alumni House, enter the Allain Library and look toward the window on the left. There's the judge, smiling back at you!

Snapshot: Tom & Anne Dubois

September 2012



The pretty farm country of Hampden and spacious cottage floor plan attracted Tom & Anne Dubois to Avalon Village, but the thing that brought these New Hampshire seacoasters to the area is daughter and son in-law Kathy & Jeff Hunt and two granddaughters, of Bangor.

Tom & Anne lived in Durham, NH from 1966-2000 until they crossed the border to Eliot, where they lived until their recent move to Avalon. They've traveled far from where they first met. Tom was a swimmer from Cheyenne, WY who majored in psychology at Grinnell College in Iowa. At Grinnell he met Anne, a native of Kansas City who was also majoring in psychology.

Tom had just finished graduate school in Buffalo when friends told the Dubois about a job opening at the University of New Hampshire - and a sailboat that they could buy and rehab together. The offer took them happily sailing to New Hampshire where Tom opened a private practice and also worked at the UNH counseling center. He retired in June, 2011.

Anne, who taught elementary school and health education, also found time to pursue painting. While the Dubois' furnishings were moved into Avalon Village, canvases were moved to her new art studio in downtown Bangor.

Their corgi, Morrie, is also enjoying his new home on Heather Way.

Don Murray's Bridge

January 2013

If you are the social type – one who looks for any occasion to spend time with friends and neighbors – then you probably know Don Murray, President of Avalon's Board of Directors, an Avalon Ambassador, and beloved friend to all.



Don and his wife, Morag, to whom he was married for 54 years, moved to Avalon Village in 2003, when the last cottages on the Wintergreen Court cul-de-sac were still being built. "After looking all around Massachusetts and Maine for a place to retire to, Morag decided on Avalon because it was near our daughter, Allison, who lives in Holden. She was concerned that one day she would be living alone, and if that happened she wanted to be in a nice community that was close to our daughter and her family." The Murrays also chose Avalon because they were impressed with how accommodating Avalon's management was in making changes to their cottage models; customizing them to fit individual needs.

The entire Avalon community was saddened when Morag died in November of 2009 after fighting a six-month battle with cancer. Ironically, it was Don who found himself suddenly living alone. As he was adjusting to his new life as a widower, he was sitting at the dining room table one evening, by himself, thinking about five other neighbors who lived on his street who were probably also doing the same thing: eating alone. "I called them up and said, 'why don't we get together tomorrow evening at the Manor House and have dinner together?'"

The group of neighbors had such a good time that the news quickly spread through the community. Don's phone began to ring. "Why wasn't I invited?" single men and ladies on Heather Way and Thistle Lane asked. "Before I knew it, a monthly singles night was born," Don says. "Someone always brings a bottle of wine and we enjoy a nice time together with a fine meal. Manor House residents have now joined us, too." Singles Night has become so popular that it is now posted on the monthly Activities Calendar to avoid conflicts with other regularly scheduled events!

Bringing people together didn't start with Don's entry into single life, however. For many years, Don and Morag lived in Easton, MA, where Don brought mothers and babies together for the first time, serving as an OB/GYN doctor for 40 years until his retirement in 2001. "I delivered over 9,000 babies during my years in our group practice," he affirmed. "I loved every minute of it."



And then, there's Don's favorite game that brings many friends together: bridge. "I play at the Hammond Street Senior Center twice a week, and with friends at Sugarloaf when I'm over there skiing during the winter. I also reserve the Manor House and host tournaments in the spring and fall at Avalon." With a grin, he added, "There's lots of work involved in organizing the tournaments, especially since folks need lots of reminders at our age." Don travels to other tournaments, too, including those held in his native New Brunswick. "One time I met a nice lady in St. John and I invited her to come to a tournament here, offering my cottage as a place to stay. She showed up with three other ladies, plus there was another lady whom I had similarly invited. The five of them took over my house!"

Thankfully, Don's Allagash cottage is big enough to accommodate many guests, helping to provide him with his most valued bridge – the one that takes him away from loneliness and brings him to many friends, old and new.

Living their dream: Dwight and Jan Rideout

September 2014



Dwight and Jan Rideout share many things in common, including the mutual friend who matched them together more than 28 years ago, and a life-long passion ... for teaching.

Dwight taught English and social studies at the former Garland St. School in Bangor before starting his 43-year tenure at the University of Maine, where he served for 30 years as the Dean of Students. Jan inspired thousands of students as a teacher of English over her 25-year career, the last 20 spent at Bangor High School. Dwight is retired, but Jan still writes weekly blogs for a website that she and her partner created - CollegeBasics.com. She also enjoys educational consulting for college applicants and their families.

Although the Rideouts lived on Eaton Ridge in Holden during their early years of marriage, they eventually moved to their dream house on Mann Hill, which Jan designed. For 10 years they enjoyed the 8-acre property with its gorgeous views of Bangor and beyond, but one day they started wondering, "Should we move now, or five years from now?"

"We decided to move while we were able to and enjoy some freedom," Dwight said, and they started looking around at different places in the area. The idea of maintenance-free living was appealing, and they also liked the idea of being part of a larger community outside of their immediate neighborhood. Hampden offers the Lura Hoit Pool, a farmer's market, and the Skehan Center among its popular amenities, along with the Edythe L. Dyer Library, located on Avalon's site!

While touring Avalon during the summer of 2013, Jan knew she had found their next dream home when she saw the high-vaulted living room ceilings in the cottage on Wintergreen Court. She and Dwight incorporated their favorite style elements from Holden into their new home, including the vibrant color palette and slate floors installed throughout the kitchen, dining, and living areas. The result was so lovely that their cottage is featured in the latest Avalon Village TV commercial (YouTube>Avalon Village Hampden Maine). They also received approval from the board to install underground electric fencing for their sweet Lhasa Apsos, Georgie and Alfie.



From the start, Jan and Dwight became very active members of the community. Dwight, who has always been involved as a problem solver – the nature of his work with students – was asked to fill a sudden vacancy on Avalon's board of directors. Without hesitation, he agreed. Jan asked to serve on the grounds committee. Through their involvement, they've gained a real appreciation for the community. "We've found so many interesting people who live here, professionally and through their avocations," Dwight said. Jan agreed. "Everyone here enriches everyone else's life. We have a very interesting and diverse sense of community here at Avalon."

Above all else, Dwight and Jan want to contribute like others who live at Avalon: those who create and organize the numerous activities, and others who help wherever they see a need. Like them, the Rideouts want to help fulfill the objective to always grow and improve the community in which they live.