

Judy Shepherd

You Help Where You Can

Sue Kennedy

Judy Shepherd grew up in New Jersey, where she lived with her parents, John and Gertrude Shepherd, and her brother, Jack. Her father worked for American Export Lines and commuted from Matawan to New York City every workday for more than 40 years.

Upon retirement, Judy's parents planned to make their first visit to West Virginia—her father's family directly descended from the founders of a little town there named Shepherdstown. (In checking the history of Shepherdstown, one finds that several early settlers came from New Jersey.) He'd always meant to visit, but as happens to many, years slipped away. Plans for the trip were put on hold when Gertrude was diagnosed with cancer. She died shortly thereafter.

To honor his wife, Shepherd finally did follow through with the plan in 1985. Like so many others, he loved Shepherdstown at first sight and returned to visit frequently. He finally sold his New Jersey home and purchased the Arthur Prather House at 108 W. German Street, Shepherdstown.

This stately and spacious building contained three private living quarters, two street-floor business spaces, and a large garden. Shepherd called in local master craftsman Jack Geary to redo kitchens and do other renovations. He did such beautiful work that the house now boasts a "Jack Geary Room" for entertaining. Eventually though, Shepherd's New Jersey roots called him back. Shepherd still lives there and, at age 90, works at a health club. Today the Arthur Prather House

belongs to Judy and her brother. Jack is now retired after a career of teaching history and coaching wrestling at the Saint John Vianney Catholic High School in Holmdel, New Jersey.

Judy Shepherd graduated from Glassboro State Teachers College (now Rowan University) in Marlborough, New Jersey, with a teaching degree in special education. After graduation, Judy married Patrick Haynes and they moved to Myrtle, Missouri. There they owned and worked a dairy farm, Judy taught special education at the Couch School, and they increased their family to include Jenny, Jacque, and Chris. The Haynes family time in Missouri spanned 14 years, and it was over way too soon. On Halloween in 1984, 40-year-old Patrick Haynes died.

With three young children to comfort and a farm to run, Judy had little time to think of herself and her own grief. There were major decisions to make. She sold the farm, packed up her life and her memories, and moved her young family to Shepherdstown. John Shepherd had moved back to New Jersey, leaving the Prather House in Judy's hands, and from the beginning, "it all felt like home," she says. With the private suites, renovated kitchens, and inviting family rooms, it was perfect for three growing children and their dynamo of a mother.

Halloween should be a happy time for kids, and Judy was determined to make it so for her children. Their father had died on Halloween and she wanted his memory to be honored with joy, not sadness. She decorated the long hall of their historic home to the teeth and invited all the children of Shepherdstown to come and enjoy treats and scary stuff and everything Halloween. The Halloween Hall celebration went on for more than 20 years. Ten years ago the "Hall" moved to the Men's Club, also known as the Community Club. Every year Judy, Jenny, Jacque, and Chris spend days decorating, always adding new and more elaborate pieces to the tableau. Halloween Hall—turned Halloween Club—has become legend.

Halloween Hall was just the beginning of Judy's immediate contribution to Shepherdstown. Each Christmas Judy and company prepare dozens of holiday gift baskets for the day care center, make costumes, and donate time and effort to the Christmas in Shepherdstown committee. Judy is also the perfectly cast lady who is Mrs. Santa Claus, reading "The Night Before Christmas" from the McMurrin lawn to children every year for more than 20 years. Judy, Jenny, and Chris also lend an ongoing hand to the Community Club, including running the reservation and event hotline.

Judy's daughter Jenny Haynes is the owner of the Now and Then shop on German Street—a wonderful place that promotes local artisans. Early on, Jenny met a veteran of the Iraq War who was making furniture out of barnwood. Each piece in the shop is wonderful and each sale helps a hero. Jenny is also a chef at the Press Room. Judy's son, Chris, manages the Now and Then shop, when he's not digging neighbors out of snowdrifts. Judy's other daughter, Jacque Haynes, served tours of duty on the USS *Bataan* with the U.S. Navy, earned a degree in nursing from Shepherd, and today works at the Veterans Administration. She and 5-year-old son Devon recently moved to their new home at Maddox Farm. "They gave me Bear so I wouldn't be lonely," Judy said with a laugh. Bear is a jet-black poodle-Pomeranian mix, a little bundle of cuteness.

Judy Shepherd is a giver, and she passed this trait on to her children. She's also not one to pat herself on the back, so allow me. It's no exaggeration to say that she has changed the lives of thousands of special education children over the years. Her work has benefited the students at Glenwood Forrest School, Gerrardstown Elementary School, Page Jackson Elementary School, The Lowery School, and Jefferson High School. Since 2000, Judy has taught special education and earth science at Loudoun County High School in Leesburg, Virginia.

Recently, Judy was awarded the Exemplary Teacher Award from Virginia Commonwealth University. She was nominated by her AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) students. AVID is the widely acclaimed education nonprofit dedicated to closing the achievement gap by holding all students to higher standards and providing them with the academic and social support to reach them.

"It's a joy being a small part of a child's life... to be able to help where you can," said Judy, explaining why she loves what she does. "My students have graduated from high school, they've taken college-prep courses, and they have made great strides. I really don't like the word disabled; my students learn in a different way. They learn in increments. The work is very rewarding, but when a former student writes or visits, that's the best reward."

Judy Shepherd is certainly a credit to her founding-family ancestors.

Sue Kennedy lives in Shepherdstown, home of the most beautiful springtime.



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