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Trey Pruitt



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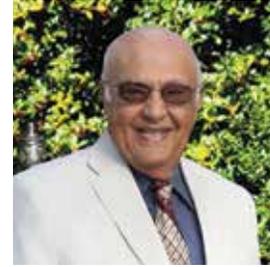
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PRESIDENT/CEO LETTER

Reopening businesses after COVID restrictions

Starting up again



Mo Ally

C OVID-19 health guidance is evolving constantly. Please be sure to check out the latest safety guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization for the most recent updates. Restrictions brought upon us by COVID-19 have recently tightened again, and normal life is on hold once more. Hopefully, that means your normal business operations will begin soon. But reopening might not be as simple as flipping your sign.

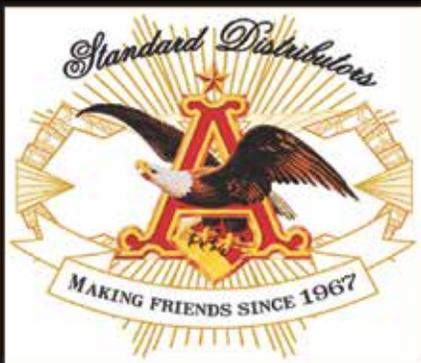
According to Intuit QuickBooks, reopening an office or storefront may mean implementing new safety policies and procedures. On top of establishing strict cleaning plans, business owners may need to allow for flexible sick leave,

consistent with public health guidance. You may also need to establish social-distancing practices among your employees and customers, which may include investing in physical barriers or modified work spaces. You may even have to rethink your business practices entirely to reduce close contact with customers.

Experts across the country agree that business owners and consumers will have to adapt to COVID-19's effects. Some believe that the recent months of self-isolation and shelter-in-place orders will shift the way the world operates permanently.

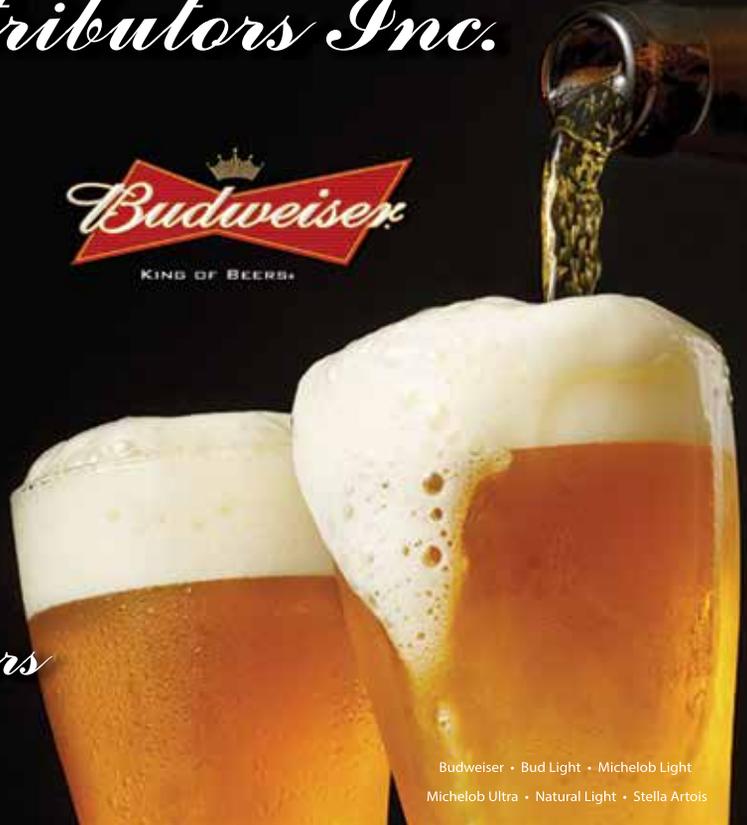
So how can small business owners prepare to reopen and prepare for future challenges? We encourage you to take a look with Intuit QuickBooks and learn more. [CL](#)

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Welcome to autumn!

Welcome cooler temps with HVAC experts Ken and Trey Pruitt



Deborah Ally

I'll bet you're as relieved as we are!

After a summer of muggy monsoons, we'll soon usher in the very welcome cooler weather of fall in Gaston County. And appropriately enough, we're doing that with two gentlemen who know all about keeping it cool: Gastonia-based HVAC experts Ken and Trey Pruitt. The Pruitts and their newly expanded and diversified company, Digitrol, are celebrating more than three decades in business. We think you'll enjoy our cover profile on them and their business.

And talking of long-term business success, Millers Automotive has been revving local engines since 1966. David and Ben Miller will tell you the latest about their business and its tradition of excellence.

Elsewhere in our pages, you'll meet one of the newest vets at TotalBond Veterinary Hospitals: Dr. Luke Boliek. Trust him and TotalBond to keep Fido and Fluffy happy and healthy.

Plus, October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The CDC offers us some very good information on mammograms. Don't miss this important article.

And powerful Polish paddler Michał Smoleń, formerly of Gastonia and now of Paris, did *très bien* in the recent Olympics in Tokyo. Representing Team USA, this remarkable rower turned in another excellent performance in his career as a slalom canoeist. Hats off to Meesh!

As always, thanks for reading *Gaston Lifestyles*. We're already working on our next edition, scheduled for release close to Thanksgiving. You'll want to *gobble* it up, too! **GL**

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Gaston Lifestyles distribution - Check locations for hours of operation

US Post Office

1882 S New Hope Road
Gastonia, NC 28054

US Post Office

301 W Main Ave
Gastonia, NC 28052

Covenant Village

1351 Robinwood Road
Gastonia, NC 28054

Millers Automotive Service

511 E Second Ave
Gastonia, NC 28054

Tony's Ice Cream

604 E Franklin Blvd
Gastonia, NC 28054

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Ken and Trey Pruitt

Pruitts diversify and expand Digitrol

Bright future for local HVAC company

By Thomas Lark

Photographs by Howard Smith and Digitrol's Facebook page

“The future of Digitrol has never been brighter.” That’s the word from Trey Pruitt, the chief operating officer of Digitrol, the Gastonia-based industrial and commercial HVAC (heating, ventilation and air-conditioning) company.

Gaston Lifestyles recently caught up with Pruitt, 41, and he gave us the latest details about Digitrol, the business founded by his father, company president Ken Pruitt, Jr., back in the late winter of 1989.

“We have experienced exponential growth over the past few years in our evolving industry,” Trey Pruitt observed.

“As the COO of Digitrol, I have been involved with all operational aspects of the company. Staying abreast of current technology, innovations and trends is essential for any business. Recently, I attained my South Carolina HVAC license to add to my current North Carolina licensures.

“One of my main goals to facilitate success within our company is to surround myself with experts within the industry,” he continued. “We have stacked our upper management with individuals possessing a wealth of knowledge and skills. A recent addition in the past two years was employing our own in-house engineer, who was in high demand in our field. Surrounding oneself with professionals that have differing databases of knowledge from one another, along with innovative ideas and solutions, is a surefire way to achieve success.”

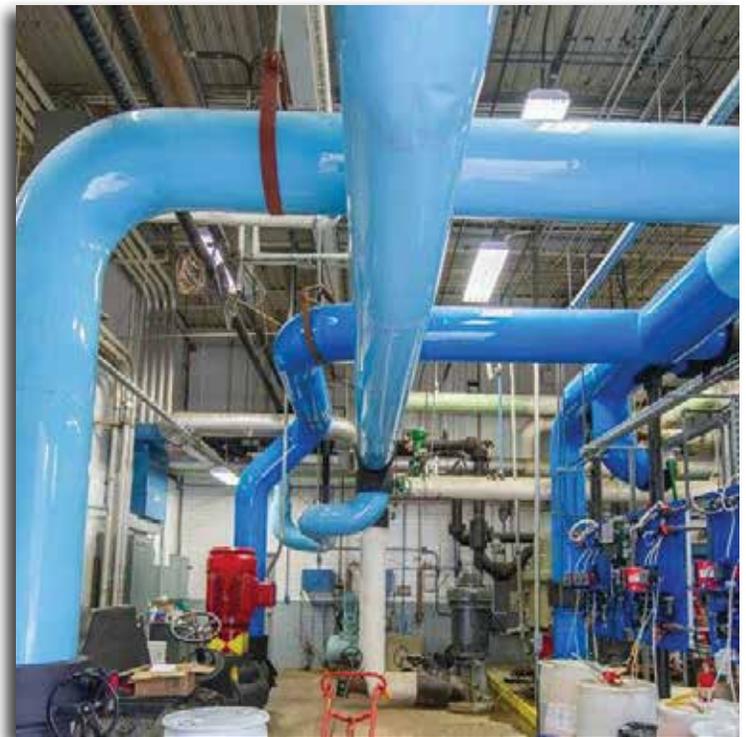
Pruitt is this year observing his silver anniversary with the company—a milestone by any measure. It’s a long way from his early years as a teenaged apprentice, helping out his dad and learning the business. Where does the time go?

“During the 25 years I have been with Digitrol, the past few years have proven our ability to diversify our specialties,” he said. “Manufacturing and industrial HVAC systems previously occupied the majority of our projects. With the crisis our nation faced recently with COVID, Digitrol was called upon to expand in the areas of health

care and educational facilities. These densely populated buildings were in dire need of ways to create healthier environments for the occupants. To meet these needs, Digitrol focuses on advanced filtration systems for the HVAC equipment in these establishments. Our goal is to create the most efficient filtration systems, resulting in air that is as free from contaminants as possible. We utilize the latest technology to create healthy facilities for people to work, heal and learn within.”

It is, as Pruitt observed, a very busy time for him and the company.

“Digitrol’s service department is still going full-force,” he said, “with repairs and maintenance on existing equipment. In addition to our bustling service department, our construction



“But even with the significant growth, Digitrol is still the same business, with the customer and employee at heart,” he added. “It’s not about growing as fast as possible. It’s about growing parallel with our customer needs, while still cultivating a prosperous work environment.”

projects have grown tremendously. We work closely with numerous general contractors on new construction ventures and renovations. With so much work, we have increased our employee base exponentially over the last year.

“But even with the significant growth, Digitrol is still the same business, with the customer and employee at heart,” he added. “It’s not about growing as fast as possible. It’s about growing parallel with our customer needs, while still cultivating a prosperous work environment.”

A hardworking man

Pruitt maintains a packed schedule. But he remains hard at work in areas outside of Digitrol as well.

“Aside from work,” he said, “collaborating with others to enrich our community has remained a top priority of mine. The Boys and Girls Club has always held a unique place in my heart. This organization is essential to establish

a substantial foundation for youth in our community. I was honored to be asked to sit on the board this year. As a member of the board, I have been provided an opportunity to contribute to this remarkable organization. The effect of organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club is what will furnish the tools a child needs to achieve goals that might have previously seemed out of reach.”

Pruitt also serves on the board of another distinctive local organization: Gaston Together.

“Gaston Together unifies a host of different impact areas that will touch most people in this community in one way or another,” he said. “The diversity of this group brings various viewpoints and issues to culminate plans for our community’s future that will positively impact every resident.”

Pruitt is also a committed Rotarian. He has been in the Gastonia Rotary Club since 2008.

“As a member of Rotary,” he said, “I am able to connect with others in the community with similar goals for Gaston County. Developing our community into a positive environment for all residents is vital for the future. These organizations all facilitate growth within our community to establish an environment where people want to raise their families. I encourage everyone I know to get out and get involved. You get out of the community what you put into it.”

The importance of family

Then of course there’s family. Pruitt is a big family man, and it’s a thing of priceless importance for him. He and Meredith, his wife of 18 years, have two children: daughter Shelton, 12, and son Coley, 11. They’re respectively in the seventh grade at Cramerton Middle School and the fifth grade at Robinson Elementary in Gastonia.

“The support of my family inspires me



Members of the Digitrol family



Trey Pruitt

to strive to advance the community as well as our business,” Mr. Pruitt observed. “The significance of community is something my wife and I strive to instill in our kids. Meredith and I met in junior high. We are both from Gastonia and have our family roots here. Our kids are increasingly keeping us on the go!

“Shelton continues to amaze us with her athletic abilities in competitive cheerleading, in which she has participated since she was 5,” he continued. “Coley is actively involved in golf tournaments around the Charlotte area, and he dedicates his free time to practicing on the golf course. Not only is he a golfer, but he’s also a talented swimmer, participating in year-round swimming. This is a rewarding time, as we watch our children discover their talents and continue to reach toward their goals. We try to remind ourselves to pause and enjoy these moments right now.”

The apple didn’t fall far from the tree. If the Pruitts’ children are so athletic, it’s probably because young Trey Pruitt was known for his prowess in various athletic programs when he was growing up.

A 1998 graduate of the Massanutten Military Academy in Woodstock, Va., Pruitt is also a 2002 graduate of Appalachian State University in Boone, where he earned a bachelor of science degree in construction technology. He began working for Digitrol at 16, so returning to the company on a full-time basis after university was a natural fit for him. Keen on continuing his education in the HVAC



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“I think the key to running a successful business is surrounding yourself with smart people, taking care of your employees and providing them with good leadership and the tools for them to learn and grow in your business.”

field, he attended classes in the subject at Gaston College, earning a degree in this not 20 years ago. Pruitt then went on to earn another bachelor of science degree: this one in mechanical engineering technology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 2008. All of this education, training and decades of experience come together to serve Pruitt well in the many responsibilities and leadership roles he performs at Digitrol.

When not working, Pruitt enjoys golf, exercising at the YMCA, hiking up Crowders Mountain and riding bikes on the local greenway with his kids.

So what advice would Pruitt offer other young working adults?

“Stay in touch with all your contacts,” he said.

“Continue to educate yourself and stay ahead of technology. Get involved in your community early as a great way to meet other young professionals, as well as

experienced professionals. Listen and get advice from experienced professionals. Sit on boards. Participate in local events, with such groups as the YMCA, the Rotary Club and the chamber of commerce, and volunteer at every opportunity you get.

“I think the key to running a successful business is surrounding yourself with smart people, taking care of your employees and providing them with good leadership and the tools for them to learn and grow in your business,” he continued. “I greatly appreciate all my co-workers. Developing good working relationships with each of them is important as we grow our company. I greatly appreciate the opportunity I have to help Digitrol grow. I strive to be a leader for our company and in our community and give back to all the organizations that have helped me grow as a young professional.”

All about the people

So what’s the best thing about working for Digitrol? For Ken Pruitt, it’s the people. Making customers happy, as the elder Pruitt recently noted, is one of the most satisfying aspects of the job.

“Digitrol still has some customers that we have been doing business with since the start,” he said. “I personally still service those accounts because of my long-term relationship with them.”

Think you might like a career in the HVAC business? It’s a good, solid profession, and there’s always a demand for it, as Pruitt observed.

“It’s always a growing and changing industry,” he said. “You have to continually keep up with the new changes, or you’ll fall behind quick.”

Pruitt spoke of how the industry has changed so much since he got started in it, back in the ’70’s. Today’s new equipment, such as software and diagnostic computers, requires a lot of continuous training.

“Whereas when I was in the field,” he recalled, “all it took was a voltmeter!”

And three years ago, the elder Pruitt diversified the company in a unique way when he added Gastonia Garage



Ken Pruitt and David McDaniel hitting the links



Door as a new division within Digitrol. He saw the opportunity to unify the two businesses as a way to benefit customers, employees and owners. Bringing in a family-based company with a strong foundation within the community is bound to inject positivity into an organization, as he noted.

Gastonia Garage Door specializes in the installation, replacement and repair of garage doors in residential, commercial, industrial and municipal settings. It provides services to existing and potential Digitrol customers. Gastonia native Cliff Carver runs this division. The company was originally founded by Carver's grandfather in 1987.

Ken Pruitt and wife Lisa celebrated their 44th anniversary this year. "When not in Gastonia, we enjoy traveling and spending time with our four grandchildren," he said. "We make a point at this time in our life to experience different destinations and appreciate each other's company. I want to embrace all the opportunities I have been afforded in life."

This is one father-and-son team that definitely has the right recipe for success. And in the HVAC business, Ken and Trey Pruitt are a collective breath of fresh air. **GL**

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Millers Automotive: 55 and time to thrive!

Local business going strong since 1966

By Thomas Lark

Photographs Courtesy of courtesy of Ben Miller



Ben Miller & David Miller

They're covered up. And in the automotive repair and maintenance business, that's a *good* thing—a very good thing indeed. As Ben Miller will tell you, in his line of work, it's entirely better to have too many vehicles to get around to, rather than too few.

Miller, 40, and his dad, David Miller, 65, run Millers Automotive in Gastonia. And since 1966, when the business was founded by the late Jap Miller (Ben's granddad), local folks have trusted the Miller family to take good care of their cars and trucks.

Gaston Lifestyles spent time with Ben Miller, and he told us all about the business's beehive of activity these days.

"I have been working in the business since I was in high school," he said, "and have been full time since graduating high school in 1999. I started working alongside my dad, just after my grandfather had retired.

"Many things in this industry have changed over the years, mainly in vehicle technology," he added, "and as those things have progressed, we have worked hard to stay ahead of the curve. We have had to make many technological improvements in the shop. In fact, the entire technical side of the shop operates entirely 'paperless,' meaning that no longer do we print out and pass along a paper work order between the front

office and the shop. That process is now entirely electronic and handled online through our operating system. That alone has eliminated over half of our paper consumption."

Accordingly, each technician at Millers Automotive is equipped with a laptop computer and tablet, which have also become quite necessary to carry out testing and repairs on modern vehicles.

"Simple part replacement repairs now often come with the requirement to the vehicle's computer programmed to accept the new part," Ben explained. "That's really just the beginning when it comes to the new technology on a vehicle. And there's no need to bother you with a bunch of technical jargon, but rest assured that our technicians are fully capable of handling all the new advances that our industry is experiencing. Not only that, but also they are constantly training on new things coming so that we will be able to serve our customers for another 55 years!"

"Even at the astonishing rate that things in the industry are changing, one thing that we understand *never* changes is the value of relationships," he added. "That's why we have been here for 55 years and have the confidence that we can be here another 55, because as my grandfather knew, my father knew and I know: it's not about cars, it's about *people*. Sure, we fix cars, but we know it's more about taking care of people. That's why our staffers, from the front to the back, work hard to take care of everyone that comes through the door."

How firm a foundation

What's the key to Millers Automotive and its success story?

It's a business founded upon Christian principles, as David explained. A sincere observance of this ethos helps the business to succeed and the Miller family to succeed. And it's always been that way.

Sixty-two years ago, Jap Miller was a deliveryman for Lee's Sandwich Shop in Gastonia. On the side, he was doing car repairs for local folks, often rebuilding generators—important parts that have since evolved into alternators in cars and trucks, as his son informed. In those days, he noted,



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It's a business founded upon Christian principles, as David explained. A sincere observance of this ethos helps the business to succeed and the Miller family to succeed. And it's always been that way.

mechanics didn't always have the reputation they do today. Many were shady, known as "shade-tree mechanics," and they were known for not always being exactly honest with their customers.

But as he was a devout Christian, that lack of proper business ethics didn't sit too well with Jap.

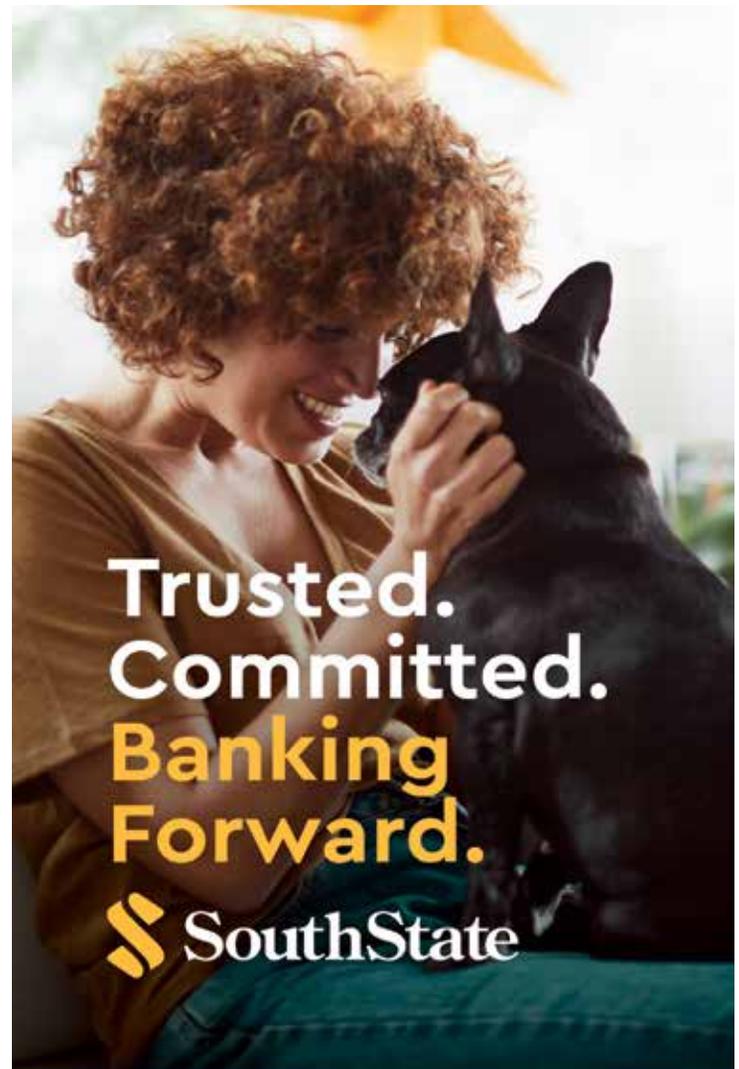
"His standards and convictions inspired him to create a brand-new business," David revealed. "As a Christian, he wanted something more ethical. He wanted to change the way the automotive repair business was done around here."

He and his brother, Richard Miller, helped their dad with his new business back in the 1970's, spending a good deal of their high school years in the automotive repair shop. The result of the Millers' hard work was a major expansion, doubling the shop in size. Jap was able to grow his operation from four bays to eight, keeping up with a big customer demand. And if you do things right, they will come.

"Our customers didn't want to go anywhere else," David recalled, adding that Millers Automotive does every kind of car repair under the sun, except bodywork. "And building that level of trust with our customers for all these years has been a tradition. We are into totally taking care of cars and trucks. And now a younger generation of customers knows that, too." **GL**



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Autumn is awesome in Gaston County!

Fall in love with fall: the best time for local fun

**By Michael Applegate, Gaston County Travel and Tourism
Photograph by Gaston County Travel and Tourism**



Michael Applegate

Fall is absolutely the best time to get outside and explore Gaston County.

As temperatures cool, and the landscape comes brilliantly alive, autumn is for many folks their very favorite season.

And you just might feel the same way when you check out our brand-new “Fall Guide 2021,” showcasing the best way to experience Gaston County this season. Enjoy the outdoors, locate our most scenic views, explore our historic downtowns, indulge in our most unique dining and create lasting memories with family and friends at our festivals.

Get outside and explore!

With the help of the Carolina Thread Trail, Gaston County offers more than 25 miles of trails that incorporate sidewalks and both natural-surface and paved paths, giving our visitors a great opportunity to get outside and enjoy nature.

Our crowning jewel, Crowders Mountain, presents the most spectacular views of a carpet of fall colors, including raw sienna and burnt umber, from the summit of its sheer rock cliffs. Other impressive hikes around the county include George Poston and Mountain Island parks and the South Fork and Seven Oaks Preserve trails.



Crowders Mountain

Harvest Moon Paddle

The warm climate in Gaston County means paddling is still enjoyable well into the autumn. Take in fall colors from the banks of the Catawba River and its related South Fork River. Anchored Soul offers special SUP (stand-up paddleboarding) adventures, such as the Harvest Moon SUP in September and Hunter’s Moon SUP in October.

Half-day guided paddling trips, new to Gaston County this year, will be available through the end of September from the Boathouse in McAdenville. Schedule your adventure today with the Catawba Riverkeeper.

Can’t miss fall festivities

Don’t miss these fall festivities! They may be found on the calendar listed on our “Fall Guide, 2021” at www.gogastonnc.org/fall-guide.

You can kick off fall and celebrate the outdoor lifestyle

Kick off fall with a Labor Day celebration at the U.S. National Whitewater Center, located in Mecklenburg County, just over Mount Holly’s Catawba River bridge. There will be three-mile and nine-mile trail races and live music by Keller & the Keels. Later in the season comes Tuck Fest, a multi-day festival with live music, races, yoga and more.

And at the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, you can watch butterflies fly off into the sunset. The garden will release the butterflies, who have called the Butterfly Bungalow home for the past few months.

At the Schiele Museum’s primitive skills workshop, you can discover the history of our human ancestors and learn some of the skills that led to survival and cultural growth.

And don’t miss the final game of the Gastonia Honey-Hunters. They’ll conclude their first season in October. Don’t miss the last few home games at CaroMont Park against the Lexington Legends, followed by the West Virginia Power to close out the season.

You can amp up your family fun with pumpkins and scenic wagon rides around Maple Springs Farm. Pick your own future jack-o’-lantern from the pumpkin patch. Fall *décor* is abundant, as they have family-grown corn stalks, decorative

As temperatures cool, and the landscape comes brilliantly alive, autumn is for many folks their very favorite season.

corn on the cob, pumpkins of all shapes and sizes and interesting gourds.

At the Lewis Farms, there's a spooky corn maze and a fall festival. You'll enjoy a horse-drawn hay ride, blacksmith and shepherding demonstrations, pony rides, a hay bale mountain, pick-your-own pumpkins and so much more.

British artist Luke Jerram's "Museum of the Moon" provides the perfect aesthetic backdrop of lighting and vibrancy during a three-week cultural celebration in Belmont. You'll experience a spectacular nighttime gallery at Stowe Park, showcasing visual arts, live music, theatrical performances and other exciting events conveniently close to

the bars, restaurants and shops on Main Street.

And after last year's cancellation, Cotton-Ginning Days has been rechristened as Heritage and Harvest Days. This festival includes many of the same activities people have grown to love over the last three decades, plus a fresh, new look.

All of Gaston County's downtowns offer a charm that exudes the festive fall spirit with shopping, dining and entertainment. There are several noteworthy events, including Countryfest on Main Street in downtown Stanley, the first weekend in October. Midmonth in Cherryville brings the Hocus-Pocus Parade, featuring Halloween characters. Later in October, they celebrate Scaryville, a Halloween party complete with a band, costume contest, spooky hayrides and a haunted house.

And the Ridgeline Craft Beverage Trail features breweries, a rum distillery and wineries extending beyond the boundaries of Gaston County. Each venue has a unique feel and would make a great addition to any of our fall events.

Don't miss the splendor of the season in Gaston County. Check out our "Fall Guide, 2021" regularly so you won't miss a thing at www.gogastonnc.org/fall-guide. **GI**



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Michał Smoleń competes in Olympics

Slalom canoeist paddles his way into history

By Thomas Lark

Photographs courtesy of Team USA photograph



Michał Smoleń

French-based slalom canoeist Michał Smoleń represented America in the recent Olympics held in Tokyo.

Born in Kraków, Smoleń, 28, is the son of Polish immigrants Rafał and Agnieszka Smoleń, now of Charlotte. For the past 13 years, Michał Smoleń, formerly of Gastonia and now of Paris, has competed at the international level for the United States. At five-11 and 154 trim pounds, he is at the peak of physical fitness. Smoleń studied at Belmont Abbey College and DeVry University.

Rafał Smoleń, a veteran of the Polish canoe slalom Olympic team, also serves as his son's coach. Mrs. Smoleń is a veteran of the Polish handball Olympic team.

Michał Smoleń also competed in the 2016 Olympics. He placed fifth at this year's K1 (individual kayak) Olympic

event. He won a bronze medal in the K1 event at the ICF (International Canoe Federation) Canoe Slalom World Championships in London, six years ago. And Smoleń finished 12th in the K1 event at the 2016 Summer Olympics, held in Rio de Janeiro, according to *Canoe Slalom*.

Seven years ago, Smoleń's first major victory came during the Under-23 World Championship in Penrith, Australia. There he won gold in the K1 event, according to NBC News.

Smoleń has a ton of experience in his chosen sport, and he is well known for his international accomplishments. These include earning a bronze medal at the 2015 World Championships. The prior year, he won gold in the Under-23 World Championships. In 2012, he placed fifth at the same event.

Smoleń pronounces his Polish Christian name the way it is said in his native country: *MEE-chaahl*. Hence, he is often



Michał Smoleń competes in the recent Olympics held in Tokyo

“Hats off to everyone who believed in me and supported me along the way. I know that I couldn’t have done it alone.”

known as “Meesh” by his teammates and others who know him.

According to Team USA, his hobbies include mountain biking, climbing and playing the guitar. Smoleń’s role model is Scottish slalom canoeist Campbell Walsh.

“He is what I call a ‘little beast,’” Smoleń recently observed of the 44-year-old Scotsman.

Mrs. Smoleń recently extolled her son to *Gaston Lifestyles*.

“We are very proud of him,” she said. “He proved again, despite all the adversities and challenges he faced, that he is one of the best paddlers in the world. It is kind of bittersweet for him. He really went for it and had great runs in the semifinal and final.”

And Michal Smoleń recently extended thanks to everyone who helped make his Olympic journey possible.

“It’s been a wild, unpredictable and emotional journey,” he said, “and I can’t believe it’s finally behind me. Hats off to everyone who believed in me and supported me along the way. I know that I couldn’t have done it alone.” 



Michał Smoleń

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Growing demand creates new college programs

Gaston College leads the way

Gaston College Marketing
Photographs courtesy of Gaston College



An increase in demand is leading to the creation of new health care programs. And Gaston College is at the forefront of meeting this need. The need for health care workers will continue to grow, even as COVID vaccination rates rise. Health care support professionals, such as medical coders, pharmacy technicians and laboratory workers, are especially in demand, and community colleges are vital to helping meet that need. Gaston College has worked quickly to add new programs to meet the needs of CaroMont Health and other health care systems locally and regionally. This fall, pharmacy technology, health information technology and central sterile processing will join the many other in-

demand programs offered through Gaston College's health and human services division.

In other college news, the textile industry's revitalization is leading to a new degree. New technologies and supply-chain constraints during the State-imposed, COVID-related restrictions are just a few of the factors that are helping to revitalize the textile industry in North Carolina. The future of the industry in the United States is high-tech driven and will rely on jobs in research and development, product development and automation.

And beginning next month, students in the new textile technology program can earn an associate in applied science degree and get hands-on experience with the state-of-the-art equipment and labs at the Gaston College Textile



Dallas campus

Gaston College has many opportunities for grants, scholarships and other financial aid. And with some new programs, such as the recently announced North Carolina Longleaf Commitment Grant, eligible students may be able to attend at no cost at all.

Technology Center. The center works with customers from around the world in developing innovative textile products used in clothing, household furnishings, medical devices, automobiles and more.

To learn more about these and other such programs, be sure to check out the Website at www.gaston.edu.

Going to college over the Internet

Getting a degree from computer-based classes is now easier than ever.

And Gaston College was recently recognized as being amongst America's best community colleges for Internet-based and accelerated classes. Germane to this, "Gaston College Express" will offer classes in a five-week format, allowing the degree to be completed in just 18 months. Students will then be ready to go on for their bachelor's degree goals at a four-year college or university.

And community college will soon be more affordable. How? Students will have new financial opportunities available to them, starting this semester. And they might be surprised at just how affordable college could be for them.

Gaston College has many opportunities for grants, scholarships and other financial aid. And with some new programs, such as the recently announced North Carolina Longleaf Commitment Grant, eligible students may be able to attend at no cost at all.

And finally, three graduates of Gaston College's broadcast and production technology program are returning to train the school's new sports broadcasting team. They will teach a new class on sports broadcasting. They'll use their experience working for various sports teams and networks to teach students in the class, who will get hands-on experience covering events for the school's intercollegiate sports program when it begins competing in the '21-22 season. 

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Gaston Country Club PeeWee Camp



PeeWee Camp



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Hart Frisk, Dylann Stallard & Hollin Hannon



Joe Toland

Dr. Luke Boliek: building the best relationships

Palmetto State native among TotalBond's newest veterinarians

By Thomas Lark

Photographs by TotalBond Veterinary Hospitals



Dr. Luke Boliek

For Dr. Luke Boliek, being a veterinarian is all about building lifelong relationships.

“I am really passionate about client education and communication!” Boliek said recently. “My favorite aspect of veterinary medicine is building lifelong relationships with clients and being with their dog or cats from puppies and kittens to adults.”

A native of Greenville, S.C., Boliek is the newest associate veterinarian at TotalBond Veterinary Hospital at Paw Creek. In 2017, he earned a bachelor of science degree in biology at Davidson College, where he also had an interdisciplinary minor in communication studies. Earlier this year, he earned his DVM (or doctor of veterinary medicine) from the University of Georgia

College of Veterinary Medicine. His clinical training included an externship in shelter medicine at the Charleston Animal Society. His special veterinary interests include client education, preventative medicine, anesthesia and oncology. He’s a big believer in bringing joy to clients by taking good care of their pets.

The son of Mike and Maggie Boliek, he has two older brothers: Wynne and Wyatt Boliek. And Dr. Boliek has a local connection. His paternal grandmother, Sally Koppen Boliek of Greenville, S.C., is originally from Gastonia.

From a young age, Dr. Boliek had a love for animals and science. Ever since high school, he knew that he wanted to one day become a veterinarian.

Whilst he currently does not have any pets, he and his family love shih-tzus. His very first dog was a shih-tzu named Mollie.

When not busy caring for animals, Boliek enjoys going to the movies, reading and hiking.

“I’m slowly growing into a hiker,” he said, “and I’m always open to hearing about good hiking trails.”

In college, he was a NCAA Division I athlete in swimming. He loves a good *quesadilla*. Asked to describe himself in a word, he said, “animated.”

“I was inspired to become a vet in high school,” he said. “I always knew that an office job was not the right fit for me, and I fluctuated on what I wanted for a long time. In high school, I did a report



Dr. Luke Boliek and one of his canine patients

“I would recommend that you get involved in some kind of animal care work early. “You need a large amount of veterinary experience hours to apply to vet school, so every little bit counts. I would also recommend diversifying your application by getting experience with different types of animals (i.e., don’t work only in a small-animal clinic).”

on careers in animal care, specifically zoos, and that inspired me to seriously consider a job in the animal care world. I started off wanting to be a zoo vet. But gradually my interests aligned with a small-animal (dogs and cats) vet.”

Boliek typically arrives at the clinic around 8 a.m.

“I start by checking my e-mail to see if I have any missed e-mails from my clients,” he said. “I then start following up on blood work or diagnostic results from the previous day. I start seeing appointments around 8:30, and then it’s just a blur of helping as many cats and dogs as I can in the day! On surgery days, it’s a little different, and I typically spend the morning in surgery spaying, neutering or performing dentals. But then I transition back to appointments in the afternoon.”

Think you’d like to pursue veterinary medicine as a career? Boliek has advice for you.

“I would recommend that you get involved in some kind of animal care work early,” he said. “You need a large amount of veterinary experience hours to apply to vet school, so every little bit counts. I would also recommend diversifying your application by getting experience with different types of animals (i.e., don’t work only in a small-animal clinic).”

Vets typically have pets themselves. But Boliek is between pets at the moment.

“I am actually very atypical in the sense that I am a vet with no pets right now,” he said. “I see myself getting one eventually. But while in vet school, I lived with three other vet students, and our house had three dogs and two cats. So I’m enjoying the peace I currently have in my apartment!” 



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October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Mammograms important to early detection

Courtesy of the CDC Division of Cancer Prevention



With October being Breast Cancer Awareness Month, now is a good time to learn more about mammograms.

A mammogram is an X-ray picture of the breast. Doctors use a mammogram to look for early signs of breast cancer. Regular mammograms are the best tests doctors have to find breast cancer early; sometimes up to three years before it can be felt.

How is a mammogram done? You will stand in front of a special X-ray machine. A technologist will place your breast on a plastic plate. Another plate will firmly press your breast from above. The plates will flatten the breast, holding it still while the X-ray is being taken. You will feel some pressure. The steps are repeated to make a side

view of the breast. The other breast will be X-rayed in the same way. You will then wait while the technologist checks the four X-rays to make sure the pictures do not need to be re-done. Keep in mind that the technologist cannot tell you the results of your mammogram. Each woman's mammogram may look a little different, because all breasts are a little different.

Having a mammogram is uncomfortable for most women. Some women find it painful. A mammogram takes only a few moments, though, and the discomfort is over soon. What you feel depends on the skill of the technologist, the size of your breasts and how much they need to be pressed. Your breasts may be more sensitive if you are about to have your period. Radiologists read mammograms and look at the X-rays for early signs of breast cancer or other problems.



Mammograms work best when they can be compared with previous ones. This allows the radiologist to compare them to look for changes in your breasts.

Tips for getting a mammogram

Try not to have your mammogram the week before you get your period or during your period. Your breasts may be tender or swollen then.

On the day of your mammogram, don't wear deodorant, perfume or powder. These products can show up as white spots on the X-ray.

Some women prefer to wear a top with a skirt or pants, instead of a dress. You will need to undress from your waist up for the mammogram.

You will usually get the results within a few weeks, although it depends on the facility. A radiologist reads your mammogram and then reports the results to you and your doctor. If there is a concern, you will hear from the mammography facility earlier. Contact your health care provider or the mammography facility if you do not receive a report of your results within 30 days.

What happens with normal versus abnormal mammograms?

Continue to get mammograms according to recommended time intervals. Mammograms work best when they can be compared with previous ones. This allows the radiologist to compare them to look for changes in your breasts.

An abnormal mammogram does not always mean that there is cancer. But you will need to have additional mammograms, tests or exams before the doctor can tell for sure. You may also be referred to a breast specialist or a surgeon. It does not necessarily mean you have cancer or need surgery. These doctors are experts in diagnosing breast problems. Doctors will do follow-up tests to diagnose breast cancer or to find that there is no cancer.

To learn more, talk to your regular doctor or check out the National Cancer Institute Website at www.cancer.gov. For Medicare information, call 1-800 MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). The CDC National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program works with health departments and other groups to provide low-cost or free mammograms to women who qualify. **GL**



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Consider key-person insurance

Small business lifeline

By Johnathan S. Lowery Lincoln Financial Securities



Johnathan S. Lowery

Would you hesitate to buy fire insurance for your lab or office building? Of course not. What about liability insurance in case someone slips on your steps? Same answer. But have you insured what could be your most valuable assets—your top employees? If not, you should consider “key-person” insurance.

Protecting your most valuable assets

The know-how, judgement and experience that build a business are found in people, not equipment or machinery. The company president, its key scientist or other essential employee helps develop new products, attract investors and generate profits. Those people could be your most important assets.

But what happens if a company’s chief researcher or

other key worker dies? The firm might fall into disarray, and investor capital could dry up. However, by insuring its top employees with key-person insurance, the business may be likelier to survive the loss.

Key-person insurance (previously known as “key-man”) offers a financial safety net. It can provide the cash needed to hire a replacement and keep the business running. That’s why savvy firms looking to keep their businesses running smoothly can benefit from key-person policies.

How it works

Key-person insurance can be structured in several ways. Typically, the business buys a life insurance policy on the life of the key person. The company is the owner, premium payer and beneficiary of the policy. The covered person could be the company’s founder, its patent-generating scientist or anyone else critical to the business.



Key-person insurance (previously known as “key-man”) offers a financial safety net. It can provide the cash needed to hire a replacement and keep the business running.

The policy may be term insurance or cash-value life insurance. The premiums paid by the company are not tax-deductible. And while life insurance benefits usually are not subject to income tax, the death benefit received by a corporation from a key-person policy may be subject to the alternative minimum tax. Key-person insurance can also be set up to fund buy-out arrangements or deferred compensation plans for a retired top employee.

Additional benefits

Besides helping to stabilize a company’s financial position following an essential employee’s death, key-person insurance can:

- serve as collateral for bank loans;
- pay off company debt or hold off creditors seeking to collect, following the key person’s death;
- instill loyalty and enthusiasm in the insured employee;
- and provide funds needed to purchase a deceased owner’s stock.

Ask yourself how much it will cost to replace a key employee in the event of death and where the cash will come from. Check with a reputable insurance professional to find out how key-person insurance can help provide some answers.

*Johnathan S. Lowery is a registered representative of the Lincoln Financial Securities Corporation, “a broker/dealer,” member SIPC [Lowery Financial Group, 1574-C Union Road, Gastonia, NC 28054. (704) 864-5401], offering insurance through Lincoln affiliates and other fine companies. This information should not be construed as legal or tax advice. You may want to consult a tax adviser regarding this information as it relates to your personal circumstances. **GL***

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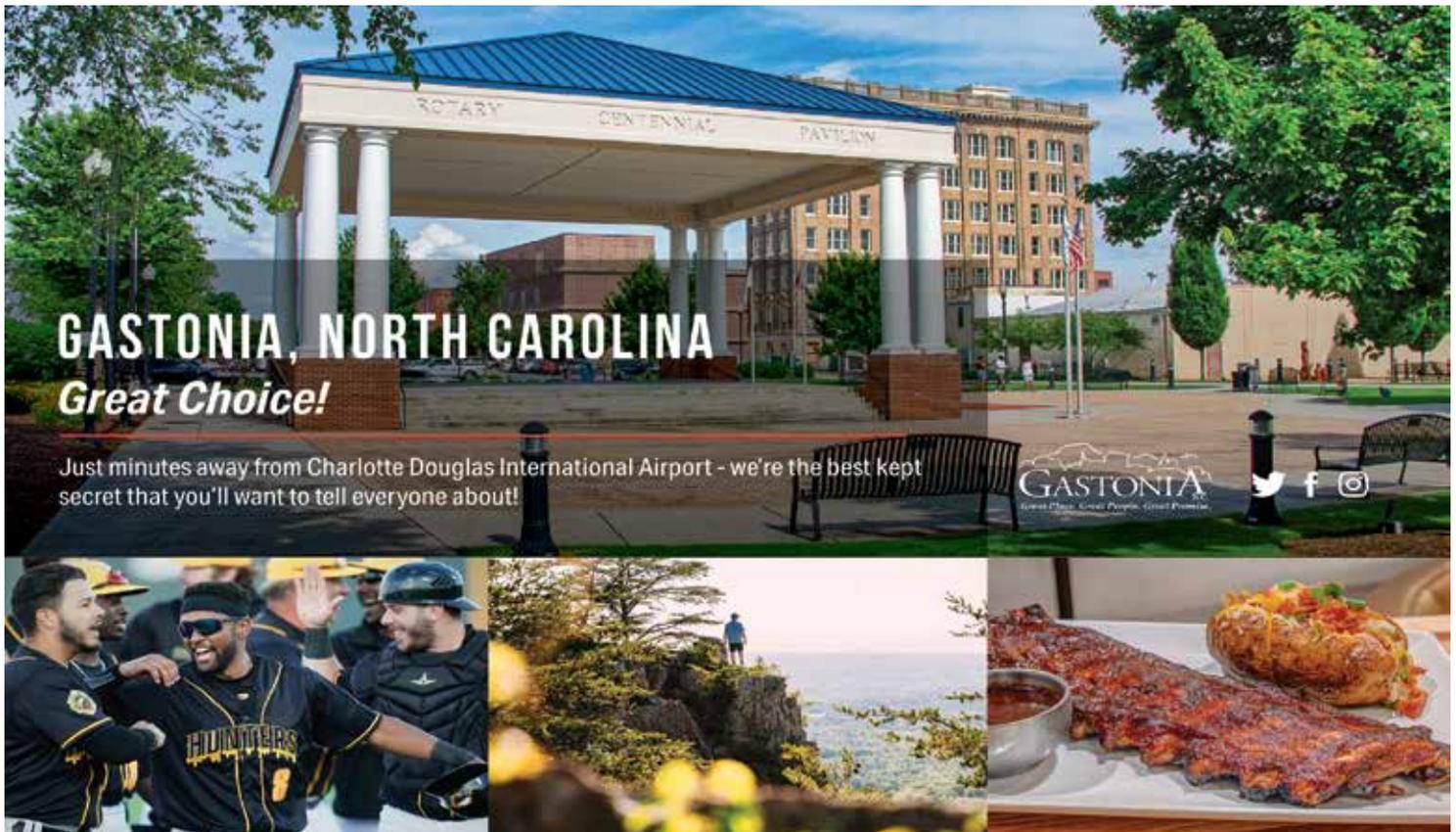
Captain Nancy Brogdon

...was recently promoted from captain to become one of two assistant chiefs for the Gastonia Police Department—the first Hispanic female so promoted in its history. A 16-year GPD veteran and a graduate of Pfeiffer University and the University of Illinois, Brogdon speaks fluent Spanish and has served in many positions, including patrol officer, community co-ordinator, grant manager and co-ordinator of the Gaston County Gang Initiative and as a detective specializing in financial and electronic crimes. Since making sergeant eight years ago, she has been a patrol sergeant, community co-ordinator sergeant, criminal investigations division sergeant and assistant commander of GPD Crisis Negotiations Team. She oversees the department's traffic and canine units, LeadsOnline, victim/witness and the U-VISA programs and commands the GPD Tactical/Mobile Field Force Team. She's also a recent graduate of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Command College. 



Sergeant Adrienne Walker

...was recently promoted from sergeant to captain in the Gastonia Police Department—the first black female so promoted in its history. A graduate of Barton College and Appalachian State University, Walker joined the GPD in 2009 and made sergeant in 2014. She has served in many roles, including patrol officer, youth detective, patrol sergeant, police training officer sergeant and criminal investigations division youth sergeant. She also serves as co-commander of the GPD Tactical/Mobile Field Force Team. A community volunteer coach, she organizes local basketball tournaments. She is a member of the Gaston County Child Fatality Prevention Team and the human trafficking multidisciplinary team and a board member of the Alliance for Children and Youth/Communities in Schools. Recognized as the Officer of the Year by the North Carolina State Law Enforcement Officers Association, she has earned multiple GPD commendations. 



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Officer David Rowland

...was recently promoted to the rank of sergeant in the Gastonia Police Department. A 12-year veteran of the GPD, Rowland has served in a number of positions with the department, including as a patrol officer, canine handler, police training officer and shift tactical officer. He is a member of the chief's advisory board and uniform committee. He earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and he also received North Carolina's advanced law enforcement certificate. **GL**



Allison Brockman

...was recently hired as the new division manager of solid waste for the Gastonia Public Works Department. She manages a staff of 43 and a budget of \$5.8 million. For the past 10 years, Brockman was the recycling and environmental co-ordinator for the City of Greenville, S.C., overseeing grant-writing and waste diversion programs, with a strong emphasis on community relations. In 2019, she was appointed by Gov. Henry McMaster to serve on the executive board of the South Carolina Recycling Market Development Advisory Council. She has received numerous awards at state, regional and national levels. **GL**



Tyler Davis

...a five-year veteran of the City of Gastonia, was recently selected as its neighborhood program administrator. In this new position, Davis will collaborate with other City departments, external partners, neighborhood organizations and community members. The objective is to further the department's mission by providing resources and education that engage citizens in building a more attractive and diverse community. Previously the City's grant manager, he was the recipient of the City's 2019 Customer Service Employee Award. **GL**

2021 INAUGURAL SEASON

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The graphic features a black background with a yellow honey-drip border at the top. In the center, three bottles of Sun Drop are displayed: a green one on the left, a red one in the middle, and a white one on the right. To the right of the bottles is the Gastonia Honey Hunters logo, which depicts a stylized bear or honey bear running. Below the logo, the words "GASTONIA HONEY HUNTERS" are written in a bold, yellow, outlined font. Several baseballs are scattered around the bottles and logo.

Digital screens wreak havoc on the eyes!

Preventing damage to your vision and your children's vision

By Kimberly Blaker, freelance lifestyle writer



Kimberly Blaker

As parents can attest, the amount of time kids spend plugged into electronic devices can be a real problem.

There are plenty of good reasons for parents' concerns. But it isn't just that it's sedentary and isolating, and it decreases their attention spans. Digital screens also cause eye damage and vision problems. One of these problems, computer vision syndrome, is also known as digital eye strain. But more concerning is the permanent damage blue light causes to the eyes. But kids aren't the only ones affected. Adults' eyes are affected by digital screens as well.

Digital eye strain

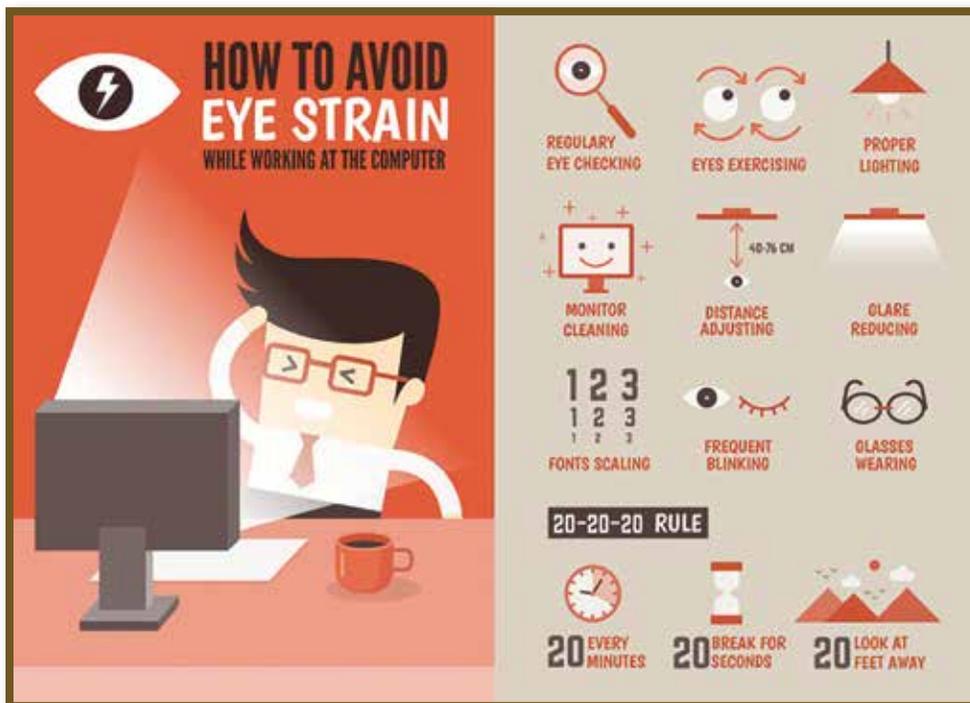
Computer vision syndrome causes vision problems and eye discomfort. As the American Optometric Association (AOA) explains, it results from extended viewing of computer

Minimizing screen time is one of the most obvious ways to reduce exposure.

screens, e-readers, tablets and cell phones. The more time spent on digital devices, the worse the discomfort becomes. According to the Vision Council, computer vision syndrome symptoms include eyestrain, dry eyes, headache, blurred vision and neck and shoulder pain.

Fortunately, there are several solutions to prevent or cure computer vision syndrome. First, set limits on daily leisure media use for yourself and your children. Because of the numerous adverse effects of media consumption, in 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) announced recommendations for children's media use.

For toddlers 18 months old and younger, just learning to talk, their screen time should be limited to just video-chatting with relatives, for example. For those up to 2 years of age, look for high-quality programming. Although the APA doesn't specify an amount of time for this age group, less than one hour a day can be presumed best, based on the next age group. For kids 2 to 5 years old, allow no more than an hour a day of media. Kids ages 6 and older should have consistent limits for their total media time and specific restrictions on various media types. In recognizing that all families and children are different, the APA hasn't set a standard amount of time for this age group. But outside of family media



activities and homework, kids should spend only a small percentage of their day plugged into any electronics.

Another way to protect against computer vision syndrome is to wear computer eyeglasses. If you or your child experience digital eye strain symptoms, make an appointment with an optometrist for a vision check. Be sure to discuss screen use to determine if computer glasses might be the right choice.

Also, when using a computer, position the screen at an arm's distance away. Increase the font size to reduce strain as well. You can also reduce overhead lighting to eliminate glare.

Finally, follow the easily remembered 20-20-20 rule that's recommended by the AOA. Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second screen break by looking at something 20 feet away.

Blue light hazards

In addition to computer vision syndrome, exposure to blue light is another digital screen hazard. Blue light comes from many sources. This includes and comes primarily from sunlight as well as LED and fluorescent lighting. But smartphones, flat-screen TV's, computers and electronic notebooks also emit significant amounts of blue light.

The problem is that our eyes can't block blue light, so it penetrates the eye lens and cornea, and then it reaches the retina. Prolonged exposure to blue light is likely a contributor to macular degeneration and vision loss.

But our eyes aren't the only thing affected by blue light. Harvard researchers have found that blue light affects our circadian rhythm and throws off the body's biological clock. *The Harvard Health Letter* reported, "Blue light has a dark side," literally. Night-time light exposure appears to be particularly unhealthy. Numerous studies have linked exposure to light at night (while working the night shift) with breast and prostate cancer, heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

Harvard researchers also point out that even dim light affects our circadian rhythm and interferes with melatonin secretion. The lack of sleep that results from it then increases the risk of depression. So there are multiple good reasons to try to reduce blue light exposure.

Minimizing screen time is one of the most obvious ways to reduce exposure. Also, shut down devices with digital screens two to three hours before bed, if possible. If not, at least dim the screen light in the evenings.

If your children require a nightlight, use a dim red light instead. This has the least impact on the circadian rhythm and eyes.

Finally, if you or your children spend much time on digital devices, stay up late or work the night shift, wear blue-blocking glasses. This will also reduce the likelihood of eye damage or throwing your circadian rhythm out of balance. 



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Grandmaster Robert D. Parker is MMA king

More than four decades as champion and teacher

From staff reports

Photographs Courtesy of Grandmaster Robert D. Parker



Grandmaster Robert D. Parker

Grandmaster Robert D. Parker gets a quite literal kick out of *karate* and the martial arts. The owner of five black belts, Parker is also recognized as the 1992 Martial Artist of the Year and the 1998 World Champion of the Year. In 2013, he earned the Martial Arts History Award, and the following year, he was recognized for Outstanding Contributions to Martial Arts. And in 2016, Parker was honored for Outstanding Dedication to Martial Arts. In addition, he has been recognized for his prowess in *kung fu*, *aikido* and much more.

His quintet of black belts is comprised of ninth-*dan* (*dan* means “level” in Korean) *hung kyun*, ninth-*dan* NAMA *kai kin do*, third-*dan* American freestyle *karate*, third-*dan* *kenpo karate* (*aikido*) and second-*dan* *shorin-ryu-karate*.

Throughout his years of competition, Parker has had the opportunity to train and compete worldwide. He continues to be the undefeated World Champion Pit Fighter: a title earned in 1988, during the infancy of what would become today’s mixed martial arts (or MMA) fighting. But at that time, his

title was earned when there were few rules, no weight classes to speak of and no specialized equipment, leaving fighters to compete with their bare knuckles. His belt still stands to this day and has yet to be taken by a new titleholder.

After several years of training stateside in kick-boxing, Parker left America for China. He continued his martial arts studies in Beijing and mastered the art of *hung kyun*. While completing his studies in China, he continued to compete in martial arts combat competitions, culminating in 1996, with his tournament win in Japan. In Tokyo, Parker became the *kumite* titleholder—a title he retains to this day.

Later he trained in Laos, studying *muy thai*. Afterward, he traveled to Thailand, and in Bangkok, he defeated the current Thai national *muy thai* champion, surprising Thai spectators in their hometown.

Now a grandmaster of multiple disciplines, Parker has enjoyed a career spanning more than 47 years of competitive martial arts competitions. It’s a successful career of both fighting and instruction. He has established numerous martial arts schools and programs throughout the country.

These schools, many of which are still functioning to this day, continue to be led by former high ranking students of his. Specializing in combative martial arts used by both military and law-enforcement agencies worldwide, Parker has also enjoyed a lifelong love of training children and women in self-defense, as well as collaborating on fight choreography for major motion pictures.

Current professional associations include the UFC, Bellator, Invicta, Fight Lab (North Carolina’s largest MMA promotion) as a business partner and Conflict fighters, both amateur and professional, as well as training assistance with many of the Florida and North Carolina-based MMA powerhouse teams. With fighters coming out of multiple



Coaching MMA ringside Myrtle Beach, SC circa 2014

He continues to be the undefeated World Champion Pit Fighter: a title earned in 1988, during the infancy of what would become today's mixed martial arts (or MMA) fighting.

camps and varied backgrounds, Parker has had the unique opportunity to work behind the scenes with them, from the beginning of their careers as amateurs all the way up to full-blown MMA titleholders, contenders and coaches.

Parker is also the East Coast brand ambassador for Knoxx Gear, a California-based performance and athletic lifestyle brand that specializes in rashguards and *jiu jitsu gi's* (*gi* contextually means "uniform" and derives from the Japanese *keikogi* or "clothes").

With a background in Chinese ground fighting and striking, Parker has cultivated training and teaching techniques with a proven effectiveness rate to mold and

enhance the fighting and training programs of any fighter of the MMA, traditional or otherwise. Examples of this training may be seen with the team he now owns and trains in Charlotte: the Dark Side of MMA. 



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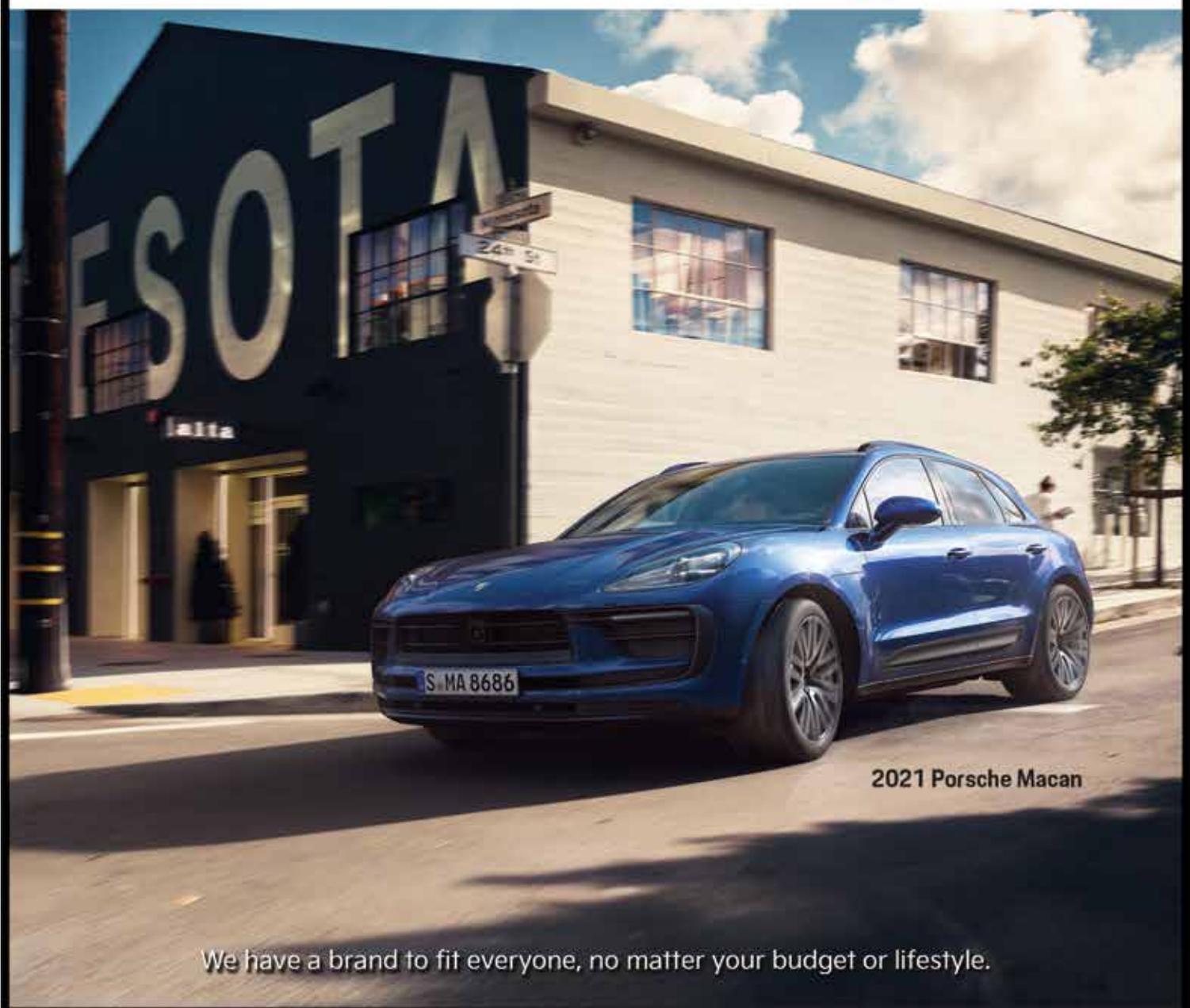
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