

A Tale of Two Women

when passions collide

BY JOANNE M. ANDERSON

The legendary actress Bette Davis (1908-1989) stated: "Clarity of mind means clarity of passion, too; this is why a great and clear mind loves ardently and sees distinctly what it loves." The new Stable at Hoge Pasture in downtown Blacksburg melds the passions of two women with great and clear minds.

A Woman of Vision

I interviewed Katherine Hoge nearly 20 years ago. She was in her 90s and sharp as a tack. She came to Blacksburg in 1927 as the new wife of John Hampton Hoge, Jr., who operated a family-owned coal mine. She was a charming, refined lady with a soft voice and the firm handshake of CEO. She spoke passionately about land she owned in Blacksburg and her determination that development never occur on it. This was not some wee wish or vain hope of an elderly person. This was an earnest, long-term commitment by a classy woman of wisdom who believed with all her heart that this promontory point in town, from which one can see more than 180 degrees over the town and Virginia Tech campus to the mountains beyond, should remain lush and natural ... forever.

To accomplish her vision, Mrs. Hoge donated a conservation easement in 1994 to the Town of Blacksburg for the 31-acre tract which stipulates that it cannot be built upon or paved. A special plaque stands at the property's edge on Graves Avenue: *Hoge Pasture, a 31 acre pasture preserved in perpetuity in the memory of J. Hampton Hoge for the visual enjoyment of future generations of Blacksburg citizens ~ A gift of love by Katherine Estes Hoge, 1994.*

Farm use is permissible, and for around 15 years, the pristine meadows and hills were home to some cows, ducks and myriad small insects and wildlife. In 2006, CC&B Development of Blacksburg purchased 88 acres to develop an upscale, in-town residential neighborhood [which has become Fiddler's Green] with the full understanding that this 31-acre parcel could not be developed. The cows continued munching grass, oblivious to the ownership change.

A Woman of Purpose

I interviewed Heather Cowan a few weeks ago. She's in her late 30s and exudes confidence, energy and enthusiasm. She came to Blacksburg in 2001 with her husband, Jim Cowan, when his firm relocated him here. Though I just met Heather, I've known her sister, Stephanie, more than a year, so I've heard plenty about what a wonderful mom, sister, friend and equestrian she is.

Hoge Pasture, LLC, of which Heather is a member, acquired the land in 2008, clearing the way for plans to open the Stable at Hoge Pasture. As an owner of these 31 acres, she speaks as passionately as the late Mrs. Hoge about the land and her meticulously planned, environmentally-responsible new horse stable.

"I grew up in Colorado before we bubble-wrapped children, and I was pretty free at 10 and 11 to ride my bike to a stables near our home," Heather relates. "I spent the day there, sometimes all alone, cleaning stalls, moving horses, checking water and finally

mounting up and riding by myself until it was time to hop on my bike and go home.” She lived in Lynchburg for a couple teen years, completing high school back in Colorado.

“I had family history at Washington and Lee University so I came to Virginia, then completed a master’s degree in molecular biology at Virginia Tech,” she explains. “I had to give up horses during college, but my dream of ‘owning one in my backyard’ nearly came true in the spring of 2005 when Manta, whom I call Ray, came into my life.”

Ray, 10, is a stunning Anglo-Trakehner horse, and together they show locally in dressage, jump some for fun and go trail riding. The dream will be fulfilled soon when the Cowans finish the barn and fences at Hoge Pasture and move temporarily into one of the nearby villas at Fiddler’s Green while their new home is being built – adjacent to the conservation land, which qualifies as “the backyard.” They hope a few others with this same dream will join them and build homes on one of the adjoining lots backing the conservation area where their horses can be in the backyard as well.

Heather has diligently researched stable and land management for a small horse farm. Her guide has been the book *Keeping a Horse, The Natural Way*, by Jo Bird. “Being a scientist, I’m always looking for a better mousetrap,” she quips. Using ecologically sound materials and a horse-centered philosophy, Heather has designed a small boarding facility with full or pasture board options, a large arena, ponds, pastures and fences, a riding trail around the perimeter and a barn with stalls from which horses can extend their heads to look into and out of the barn. Horses are highly social creatures and like to be able to see around them, as well as have fresh air circulating through the structure.

“Hoge Pasture will forever be conserved as farmland,” she declares, “a haven from the hustle and bustle for our animals. We are committed to environmentally friendly pasture management practices including rotational grazing, avoidance of harmful pesticides and herbicides and low animal densities to promote lush pasture growth and avoid erosion. It is a healthy environment for healthy horses. We are honored to be stewards of this remarkable piece of land.”

The late great lady Katherine Hoge and the contemporary equestrian Heather Cowan are kindred spirits - women passionate about land preservation. Women of vision and purpose.

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For more information, visit www.hogepasture.com