Mountain Homes
highlighting unique homes of the plateau
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The perfect home for a front porch family... at the Hickock House

Time passes gently while at this casual retreat

BY CHRISTINE MADDUX
Special to Mountain Homes

There was a time when southerners commonly enjoyed sitting on the front porch, perhaps with a glass of iced tea in hand and a languid dog lounging at their feet. Time would pass gently and slowly, and casual conversation with passers-by was welcome.

This tradition lives on at the home of Clark and Mary Lou Hickock of

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Photos by Bill Maddux

Time passes gently and slowly here at the Hickock house, owned by Clark and Mary Lou Hickock in Burlingame.

Photo by Bill Maddux

Clark and Mary Lou Hickock settled down at their home in Sapphire after living in San Diego for 21 years, where Clark was hired by a defense technology company. Their dog, Beasley, is a seven-year-old Labrador retriever.

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Sapphire, who much prefer a friendly front porch to a private backyard retreat.

"When we were looking for a home here, I just wanted a place where I could watch the world go by," said Mary Lou.

After viewing dozens of houses, they chose one with a broad front porch, although it was empty, uninviting and completely hidden by an overgrown hedge at the time. When they bought the house, the hedge came down, the rocking chairs came out, and front porch life in their beautiful, new territory began.

They had met and married in Texas and later moved to San Diego for 21 years when Clark was hired away from a defense technology company to apply the non-classified aspects of his expertise to the burgeoning telecommunications industry.

His work entailed extensive international travel to acquire nearly two dozen companies, which brought he and Mary Lou into contact with many interesting cultures and foreign dignitaries. However, Clark said "it's now on my bucket list to never get on an airplane again."

When he retired, they decided to leave San Diego for a more financially friendly place, and the couple toured potential retirement destinations on their Harley-Davidson motorcycles. They eliminated Texas and Florida, but fell in love with this area and moved here seven years ago. Then they permanently parked their motorcycles, a lifestyle change that made it possible to get a canine companion.

They adopted their beloved Beasley, a Labrador retriever who had been trained for search and rescue service but was retired early because of the extra care associated with his atypical silver coat. Now seven years old, he and Clark take a three mile walk every morning, then he settles into his comfy cushion on the front porch or accompanies Clark to work.

Although Clark tried retirement, he said he hated it. So, he searched for a local business to buy, and purchased Appalachian Golf Cars in 2015.

"One of the main reasons we bought the business was to be able to give back to the community," Clark said. "We try to take good care of our employees, keep the shop open year-round, and send trucks out to deliver and service."

The golf cart business gave the Hickocks valuable insights into golf courses and clubs throughout the region.

"We do business in 11 counties, and have about 6,000 golf carts on the Plateau," he said. "For us, moving to Burlingame was an easy choice. The

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P.O. Box 1040, Cashiers, NC 28717
Call 828-743-5101 | Fax 828-743-4173

OUR STAFF:

Publisher: Ryan Hanchett
publisher@highlandsnews.com

Editor: Michael O'Hearn
editor@CrossroadsChronicle.com

Design: Michael O'Hearn and Stephanie Mason
production@highlandsnews.com

Advertising Sales: Marci Sherwood
ads@crossroadschronicle.com

Q+A with White Oak Realty Group

Broker: Deborah "Bee" Gleeson

Q. When was your first visit to the Highlands-Cashiers area?

A. It all started in '93. After Pat and I were engaged in Laguna Beach, we flew home to celebrate our news with 20 of our best friends in Highlands. For the next 20-plus years, we were hooked and drove up every chance we could. Most often, we rented in the Mirror Lake area and fell in love with it. We'd shed a tear each Sunday when it was time to leave. Now we've been here full time for six years in our Mirror Lake cottage.

Q. What led you to choose real estate as a career?

A. Both of us left "corporate America" and took a leap of faith moving here. Pat said, "wait a minute, we need to work," and suggested we go to real estate school. Being lousy at math, I said "no way" but we both passed the tests and became licensed brokers. It's the best thing we ever did.

Q. How long have you been in the business?

A. Everyone needs great mentors. We began our careers with Pat Allen Realty. Pat was so kind and encouraging to us. To better understand the Cashiers market, we joined McKee Properties, where the legendary Beth Townsend took us under her wing and helped us succeed. One day, we received a call from Susie deVille, founder of White Oak Realty Group and we acquired her firm and do our best each day to continue her level of excellence in the profession.

Q. What energizes you and brings you excitement? Why?

A. I love to cook, but especially bake. We celebrate with friends and clients all the time on our deck with dinner parties, cocktail parties, and holiday events. At the office, we have "Fresh Cookie Friday" every week with a plate full of fresh cookies for clients and passers-by. Come see us on Fridays.

Q. Do you have experience in other fields?

A. I've been blessed with such positive work experiences. During my years with The Ritz Carlton Hotel Company, all of us followed the corporate credo which was "we are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen." I still follow it today and try to live it in all of my relationships.

Q. Do you specialize in any neighborhood or area?

A. We do business across the entire Highlands-Cashiers Plateau, but living in the Mirror Lake community naturally makes that area a real passion for us. My husband Pat is working with the Mirror Lake Improvement Association's "Save the Lake" effort which will return the lake to its natural splendor over the next few years and protect property values on and around Mirror Lake.

Q. What do you enjoy the most about living here?

A. The freedom and safety of being in Highlands. I'm five minutes from anywhere in town, there's no traffic, compared to Atlanta, free parking, casual, and without question the friendliest place on the planet.

Q. What makes your job enjoyable?

A. The real estate business here is so enjoyable. Buyers are happy to be here; Sellers are sad to leave; that says it all in my mind. I love "the hunt" and finding just the right home for a buyer. I always advise, "don't settle, patience will help you find that perfect place." I try my best to coach sellers to price their properties realistically, versus "let's see how much we can get." There's a big difference sometimes.

Q. When you're not working here, how do you like to spend your time?

A. True confessions here. I'm a recovering shopaholic, but I fall off the wagon occasionally. I love shopping at Vivace in Highlands and Cashiers; Julie's my fashion consultant, and Lane Leddy keeps me current! Rosenthal's window makes me feel like I'm in NYC. I'll head to CK Swan or Citizen Wilder for hostess and client gifts. Jannie Bean is one of my best friends, and her shop leaves me and drooling over all the fine jewelry. The Wine Shop is great where my former Atlanta neighbor, Anna Bring, works.

Q+A with Engel & Völkers

Broker: Ken Fernandez

Q. What was your first job, and what did you learn from it?

A. My dad was a builder on Long Island. Beginning at age eight, I would go to work with him when school was out. I remember him having me pick up nails on the job site and straighten them out to reuse. I learned many lessons from that experience, some as simple as learning not to smash my little fingers with the hammer while straightening out the nails. Other, more important lessons included the value of honesty, efficiency, and a strong work ethic.

Q. What led you to choose real estate as a career?

A. I have always been a "people person" and the real estate profession seemed to be a natural progression after twenty-five years in the hospitality industry combined with my knowledge of home building. Further, I truly enjoyed our own home buying process when my family and I moved to Cashiers. Sue Reid was our Buyer's agent and she had a great attitude and made the process look effortless and fun. After that, I never looked back.

Q. What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

A. My dad was probably the "smartest" person I know, and I was fortunate enough to be offered invaluable advice from him throughout the years. I would have to say his "words of wisdom" that stood out most to me is to "never stop learning and growing as a person." It's something that I try every day to do.

Q. What led you to move to the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau?

A. My aunt, Ann Jacob, opened the Ann Jacob Art Gallery in Highlands back in the 1970's and then my parents followed in the early 1990's. Over the course of the years, my wife, Colleen and our three children would visit and undoubtedly fell in love with the area. As a result, we decided to move here permanently in 2003.

Q. Why did you choose to work at this firm/company?

A. I came to work at Old Cashiers Realty in 2014 after owning my own firm in Cashiers for six years prior. In 2020, our company decided to purchase the Engel & Völkers franchise rights for Western NC. Currently, we have our Highlands Cashiers office and an Asheville office, with more to follow.

Q. What affiliations does your company have?

A. Engel & Völkers is one of the world's leading service companies specialized in the brokerage of premium residential property, commercial real estate, yachts and aircrafts. Based in over 800 locations in total, Engel & Völkers offers both private and institutional clients a professionally tailored range of services. Consultancy, sales and leasing form the core competences of the staff of more than 10,000 people. The company is currently operating in over 30 countries on five continents.

Q. What makes your job enjoyable?

A. I have the best job in the world. I am fortunate to be able to work in an absolutely beautiful place with one of the best teams out there. I'm also privileged to work with such a diverse clientele and to be able to assist them in obtaining their mountain dreams.

Q. What is this area's best kept secret?

A. I feel that one of the best kept secrets is the abundance of all the hidden trails, waterfalls, streams, and rivers in the area. I have lived here almost 20 years and it is not uncommon for me to run across an outdoor experience I have never encountered before.

Q. What advice do you give to buyers who are new to the area?

A. I would encourage buyers to be diligent and to take their time when pursuing a home/land purchase. In addition, I would suggest having an experienced full-time Realtor educate them on the area's different nuances here on the Plateau before identifying a home to make an offer on.

Q. What makes you stand out from other agents in the area?

A. I have been able to apply the most important aspect of my service industry background, "anticipating client needs," to my real estate brokerage. Along with my local knowledge of the Plateau, I recently received a Development Services Designation from Engel & Völkers. This indication allows me to assist developers, small and large, with land acquisition, entitlements, market analysis, construction, sales and marketing. I am currently working on a mixed use 55-acre Cashiers Hillside project and the 22-acre Terrasee project just east of the Crossroads with award winning developer Stephen Macauley.

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Photo by Bill Maddux

The Hickocks have renovated and remodeled their casual retreat inside and out, and the kitchen, foyer, and living and dining rooms are paneled with ghost wood, achieving the look of barnwood without having to remedy decay and insect damage. The house also uses wooden pallets that are delivered to their shop, Appalachian Golf Cars, which Clark bought in 2015.

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people are not just friendly, they are also very down to earth, and we like that."

So, after renting a house for 18 months, they bought their home in the Burlingame community and joined its country club, where Clark plays golf year-round as long as it is at least 40 degrees, and where Mary Lou has won multiple Ladies' Club championships even while working full time in the family business.

When one of their sons and his family decided to join them in North Carolina, moved in down the street, and came into the business, some of Clark's time was freed up.

"I'm finally able to really use my golf membership", he said.

Mary Lou has recently retired, "which [she] had been looking forward to ever since we moved here." Now she has more time to play golf and enjoy gardening and can savor more time with their grandchildren as well. In addition, she oversaw long-awaited home improvements when contractor Wade Hunter was ready to tackle their house, inside and out.

The exterior received a full facelift to showcase the front porch. Poplar bark now wraps the front of the house and the garage, and the house is painted a darker hue.

South Carolina specialty painter Brian Galloway transformed beige metal doors on the house and garage into works of art simulating rich wood grain.

Gardens and extensive lighting were added around the circular driveway, making the front porch conducive to evening as well as daytime gatherings which include cornhole competitions among family and friends, and Bible studies. The final touch was just completed, and crumbling railroad tie landscape borders were replaced with rock.

The house has changed inside as well. A wall with a pass-through was removed to open and expand the kitchen, which now features a large center island and leathered granite countertops. The kitchen, as well as the foyer, living and dining rooms, are paneled with ghost wood, achieving the look of barnwood without having to remedy decay and insect damage.

Inspired by the barnwood look, Mary Lou experimented with the wooden pallets that accumulate as golf carts are delivered to their shop. After dismantling and sanding them, she used them to panel the bar and the master bedroom suite, and to build a headboard and nightstands for the guest room.

All this handiwork and more emerges from a spacious former crawl space transformed into an airy workshop where Mary Lou has ample room to operate all her power saws, do crafts with her grandchildren, and store copious outdoor Christmas decorations including life-sized, lighted deer.

The house, filled with family photos and words of inspiration, remains relaxed and accommodating for their visiting children and their families.

"They love our downstairs," said Mary Lou, "because they have plenty of their own space," including bedrooms, a bathroom, a living area, game room and deck.

One downstairs room is currently set up as Mary Lou's school. As a former speech therapist, she assists their young granddaughter.

"We have 12 grandchildren and the first 11 are boys. So she is my princess," said Mary Lou, with a smile.

The main floor of the house also has a spacious screened porch in the rear,

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Photo by Bill Maddux

The house, which is filled with family photos and words of inspiration, remains relaxed and accomodating for visiting family and their children.

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overlooking a pond and Burlingame's eighth fairway. The Hickocks enjoy that porch, too, if loud trucks are hauling on their street on a given day.

But the front porch is what they came for: a place to slow down and enjoy their little corner of this idyllic Plateau.

"I am in awe of the beauty here every day", said Mary Lou, "and I say, 'Thank you, Lord.'"

Benefits of leisure activities extend beyond beating boredom

Leisure activities may be widely viewed as fun ways to fill up free time, but the benefits of leisure activities extend beyond beating boredom. A 2011 analysis published in the journal BBA Molecular Basis of Disease found that leisure activities have a positive impact on cognitive function and dementia.

The analysis, conducted by researchers with the Aging Research Center in Stockholm who examined various studies regarding the relationship between certain activities and cognitive function, defined leisure activity as the voluntary use of free time for activities outside the home.

After retirement, leisure time constitutes a large part of many retirees' lives, and finding ways to fill that time is more beneficial than merely avoiding boredom. The researchers behind the study concluded that the existing research is insufficient to draw any firm conclusions regarding the effects of certain types of leisure activities on the risk for dementia and cognitive decline, though they did note that multi-domain cognitive training has the potential to improve cognitive function in healthy older adults and slow decline in affected individuals.

A multi-domain approach to cognitive training involves memory, reasoning, problem-solving, and map reading, among other activities. Aging adults who embrace activities that require the use of such skills may find that they're not only finding stimulating ways to fill their free time, but increasing their chances of long-term cognitive health as well.

Submitted photos

Gus Bright, left, Jessica Hoheisel, center, and Karaline Shomaker, right, are the three new brokers at McKee Properties.

McKee Properties welcomes three new brokers to Plateau

To support its success in the Cashiers-Highlands real estate market, McKee Properties has announced three additions to its agent team.

Gus Bright has joined the company as a broker associate.

A 15-year real estate professional, Gus has participated in closing more than $100,000,000 in sales during his career. Gus and his family live full-time on Daniel Island and have enjoyed visiting the Cashiers area for more than 12 years.

In addition to his role with McKee Properties, Bright is also a sales executive with Akers Ellis Real Estate, which provides real estate and vacation rental services to Kiawah Island, Seabrook Island and Johns Island.

An alumnus of Emerson College in Boston, Bright enjoys playing his guitar by his fire pit, fly fishing the streams of Panthertown and spending time with friends on Lake Glenville and Buck Knob Island when he's not busy serving clients.

Karaline Shomaker has recently earned a North Carolina real estate license and is now a broker associate with the company and supports McKee Properties' marketing and administrative areas.

A Highlands native, Shomaker joined McKee Properties in 2017 after previously working for Mountaintop Golf and Lake Club.

She is a graduate of Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, where she majored in public relations. Karaline enjoys baking, cooking, walking, hiking, reading and traveling in her spare time.

Jessica Hoheisel has joined the company as a broker/licensed assistant to co-owner/broker Liz Harris.

After visiting Cashiers almost every summer for 20 years, Hoheisel relocated permanently to the area in 2020 from Northern California, where she and her husband owned a landscape company.

Hoheisel studied business administration at Simpson University in Redding, CA. In her spare time, she enjoys boating on Lake Glenville, hiking with her dogs and socializing with friends and family.

For more than 40 years, McKee Properties has served as the expert in Cashiers-area luxury real estate. It consistently ranks among the top agencies on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau. To learn more, visit mckeeproperties.com.

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How to add shade to a deck or patio

Homeowners eagerly await the arrival of the warm weather so they can cast off the remnants of cabin fever and bask in the sunshine. However, as summer nears its dog days, the same sun homeowners once coveted can contribute to uncomfortable conditions in outdoor entertaining spaces.

Meteorologists in Kentucky took to their neighborhoods in July 2020 to test just how hot surfaces can get in the sun during peak daytime temperatures. Concrete sitting in the sun almost all day reached a temperature of 134.7 degrees, while the same concrete in the shade clocked in at just under 80 degrees. When air temperatures are around 90 degrees, unshaded concrete and asphalt can be 125 degrees and 140 degrees, respectively. While wood decking may not be as hot as asphalt and concrete, it still can get steamy underfoot.

Homeowners who want to be able to enjoy their outdoor spaces in an array of temperatures can think about investing in shade solutions. Sun-blocking ideas like awnings, shade trees and large umbrellas can help people enjoy their yards all day long.

• Canopy: A patio canopy is typically a freestanding unit that can be installed over a patio or a deck. Some people prefer to bolt it down so it will not be knocked over in windy conditions. The fabric on the canopy can be removed during the offseason, helping to improve its longevity.

• Awning: Awnings may be stationary or retractable. Many are installed directly onto a home and can cast shade on specific areas of outdoor entertaining spaces.

• Shade sail: Similar to an awning but a bit less structurally rigid, shade sails are large pieces of triangular fabric installed over areas of a patio, pool or landscape, according to The Family Handyman. Shade sails are light and airy and can be customized.

• Trees: A natural way to increase shade in a yard is to plant more shade trees. If sun glare is an issue all year long, and it's not just the heat of the sun that is troublesome, think about planting evergreen trees.

Submitted photo

Deciduous cousins will drop their leaves in fall and only be effective during the warm weather.

• Patio umbrellas: Many umbrellas start at around $25. Umbrellas can be paired with patio tables, while stationary cantilever umbrellas sit out of the way on their own heavy-duty stands. A cantilever umbrella tends to provide more shade than patio table umbrellas.

• Curtains: Homeowners can block sunlight outdoors the way they do inside, offers MSN. Hang curtains from the sides of canopies or between posts on a deck to provide shade and cozy spaces.

Shade is in high demand when the sun is hot. Options abound for making outdoor areas more comfortable.

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How to prepare your home for fires, floods, hurricanes or tornadoes

Everyone wants their homes to be safe, comforting spaces that offer refuge and protection from the outside world. The global pandemic has taught us this, as well as the importance of preparation – not just for illness — but also for natural disasters like fires, floods, earthquakes, and tornados.

Making sure your house is a secure and resilient structure is critical no matter where you live, as global warming has altered the climates and weather events of many regions. Fortunately, thanks to advances in design and innovative materials, building a stronger, disaster-proof home is possible.

An alternative to traditional wood-framing, Nudura insulated concrete forms are an excellent option many engineers and designers are turning to. The steel-reinforced solid concrete cores range from four to 12 inches, providing far superior strength and safety compared to wood. Meanwhile the non-toxic, fire-retardant expanded polystyrene foam provides a fire protection rating of up to four hours.

Homes built with these ICFs are proven to survive natural disasters — houses that faced Hurricane Michael in Florida and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans are still standing. ICFs even offer wind resistance of up to 250 mph, equivalent to an F4 tornado.

Homes that use ICF construction have other added benefits, including enhanced insulation for lower energy bills, a reduced carbon footprint, and improved ventilation for better indoor air quality and lower susceptibility to mold. Concrete forms also require less maintenance over time, saving you the expense and effort of continuous upkeep and providing additional peace of mind.

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