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What is that thing on the lake?

Houseboat turning heads, getting attention

By REBECCA BRIA
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It's not a small barge or an RV on water. But the new houseboat on Harveys Lake has been getting plenty of attention from passers-by, many of whom wonder exactly what it is.

The 8,000 pound Canadian military pontoon boat was transformed into a houseboat by 47-year-old Jim Johnson of Harveys

Lake.

"The charge of the boat was to build a vessel that could sustain itself for seven days, whether in a parking lot on a trailer or in a lake," Johnson said. "The real goal is in three years, I've got to retire. This is not going to be on Harveys Lake next year. It's basically a divorce boat. After a divorce, you've got so much energy."

Since his divorce four years

ago, Johnson has put over 10,000 hours of labor into creating the houseboat which he calls, "Against the Wind" because, he says, his entire life has been against the wind.

"Against the Wind" is about 75 percent complete with only aesthetic additions remaining. The boat is fully insulated, featuring thermal pane windows and propane heat and hot water. A self-sustainable sewer system allows

for a full shower and toilet. Two queen size beds - one drop down and one pull-out - are on board, along with a pull-out table inside and lounge chairs on the back deck. The boat also boasts a full-size refrigerator, closets, an LCD TV, full audio and visual surround sound, a global positioning system and sonar.

Johnson plans to add flooring and shelves on the main level as well as a hot tub and speakers above top, acknowledging that

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CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Jim Johnson has all the comforts of home on his houseboat. The 47-year-old Harveys Lake resident re-engineered an RV and converted it into an all-season water home.

QUEEN FOR A DAY



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Gabrielle Dragon is crowned Lake-Lehman's Homecoming Queen. Cody Lamoreaux, a member of the Black Knights football team, was named Homecoming King. For more photos of Lake-Lehman's Homecoming festivities, please see page 8.

Her writing helps deal with anxiety

Kimberly Kirk's book details her personal relationship with God.

By REBECCA BRIA
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Her suspicious mammogram four years ago turned out to be nothing. So Kimberly Kirk wasn't overly worried when, in January of this year, her annual mammogram showed a tumor that proves to be benign 90 percent of the time.

But Kirk didn't fall in the usual 90 percent. This time, at age 43, she had stage one breast cancer.

"I was really knocked for a loop when I found out it was cancer," she said. "I was just in a fog. I wanted to be told what to do...and it wasn't that way at all."

The Dallas resident's cancer is now in remission and she has written a book called, "The Journey: A Testimony of God's Faithfulness Through My Battle With Breast Cancer," detailing a personal relationship with God.

Writing is not new to Kirk, an author, Bible teacher and speaker.

In addition to her new book, she has also authored two Bible study workbooks, a book of dramas and a 12-week devotional. She self-publishes with a digital printing service through Offset Paperback.

Kirk's book on her fight with breast cancer is comprised of e-mails she sent to her prayer team, which started out with 20 people and soon grew to 100 members.

"It was very cathartic to me as I wrote the e-mails because it forced me to deal with what I was facing at that moment," she said. "I wept and I remember one time I was shaking in fear. God was with me and carried me through."

The main decision Kirk had to face during her cancer was how to fight it. After much prayer and consideration, she opted to have a bilateral mastectomy and reconstructive surgery at the same time. Her cancer did not require any chemotherapy or radiation.

On the Sunday before her surgery,

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"It was very cathartic to me as I wrote the e-mails." moment.

Kimberly Kirk
Author and
breast cancer
survivor

Working hard to be good neighbor

By REBECCA BRIA
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Employees of Solid Cactus head outside their workplace on South Lehigh Street in Shavertown with garbage bags and gloves in hand four times a year.

The e-commerce store developer adopted a section of the street to clean up and give back to the Back Mountain community where 135 employees of the company work every day.

"We just want to be a very valuable and good neighbor to the folks out here," said Scott Sanfilippo, co-founder, president and chief operating officer of Solid Cactus.

Perhaps that's one reason why Solid Cactus is an Inc. 500 company and was named one of the "Best Places to Work in PA" for the third consecutive year in 2008.

In 1994, Sanfilippo and his friend, Joe Palko, were both working full-time jobs and started ferretstore.com to make extra money. The two received many requests from other small business owners for help in developing a commercial Web site.



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Inc. 500 company Solid Cactus, founded by Scott Sanfilippo, has refurbished much of the former Westmoreland School building in Shavertown to contemporary specifications.

Sanfilippo and Palko started a second business doing just that and, in 2002, the Web design and printing departments for ferretstore.com broke off into a second business named Solid Cactus. Solid Cactus became so successful that, in May 2007, the partners sold ferretstore.com.

Solid Cactus relocated its headquarters from Wilkes-

Barre to the former Westmoreland School in Shavertown in April of this year, citing parking, which is limited in the city, as the main reason for the move. Parking space in the city costs money and Sanfilippo does not expect his employees to have pay to park their car while they're at work. Other reasons for the move to the Back Mountain include less

crime, a quiet, rural area and plenty of fresh air.

Complete renovations were done on the building where many Back Mountain residents once attended school. Although the building was gutted, the gymnasium was kept intact and new basketball hoops and ping pong tables were added. A fitness center with locker rooms and showers and a company subsidized in-house restaurant were also constructed.

Yet, Sanfilippo says old classroom areas are still distinguishable.

"We did have a lot of people come through the building during the grand opening who said, 'I went to school here; this is really neat,'" he said. "We took an old building that basically was deteriorating in a residential area and reinvigorated some life into it. It was a challenge for us. It was a lot of fun. I think it's a great way to reuse property rather than put up a new building."

Solid Cactus also supports the local community through its Solid Cactus Cares fund. Administered through the Luzerne Foundation, the fund is supported by employees who

donate money on a weekly basis. Solid Cactus matches all employee donations and those who participate in Solid Cactus Cares choose a charity for the company to donate to each quarter.

Through Solid Cactus Cares, the company has donated a new Web site for Kingston Township and is working on the Back Mountain Recreation, Inc. Web site.

"We've given away quite a bit of money so far to quite a bit of charities in the area," Sanfilippo said. "We're not only working here and paying taxes here, but we feel we should give back to the community."

And, of course, Solid Cactus employees benefit the Back Mountain economy by frequenting restaurants, supermarkets and convenience stores.

Solid Cactus executives have been meeting with officials from the Back Mountain Trail so employees can utilize the trail.

"We try to maintain a very unique work environment," Sanfilippo said. "Our inventory is our people and, without those people, we don't have a Solid Cactus."



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