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## So You Want to Own a Restaurant?

*The demands are a recipe for failure unless one prepares well, say those who've risen to the challenge*

BY PAM GEORGE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT NATHAN

Would-be restaurateurs regularly approach Josh Grapski to “pick his brain.” That’s not surprising. Grapski is president of La Vida Hospitality, which owns and operates Nage and Big Chill Surf Cantina on Route 1 near Rehoboth Beach, as well as the Taco Reho food truck and Crooked Hammock, a brewpub under construction just outside Lewes.

What is surprising is that many such requests come from people outside the business. Grapski can generally separate them into three categories. Home chefs, encouraged by the “wows” garnered from appreciative friends and family members, want to share their recipes with the masses. Others are attracted by the lifestyle — or their perception of it. “Man, your business looks like so much fun,” they tell Grapski. “I would love to work in a restaurant — it wouldn’t feel like work.” Then there are those who tell him they have a concept that’s going to be “a home run.”

The proximity to the sea sweetens the appeal. Stressed out in their current jobs, they imagine shucking the 9-to-5 grind to spend their days on the sand and their nights in the restaurant, chatting with happy customers. Come winter, they’ll take a month-long vacation or two.

Mike Clampitt gained experience in various aspects of the restaurant business before opening Po’ Boys Creole & Fresh Catch in Milton in 2013.





Owner Steve Hagan hands food off to Kat Alberta at Hooked Up Ale House and Raw Bar in Millville, one of the restaurants he owns in coastal Sussex.

All these hopefuls have one thing in common: “They’re thinking of one small aspect of a business that has a lot of components,” says Grapski, who has a bachelor’s degree in hospitality management from Cornell University and is also a graduate of The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College in Philadelphia. “They might have a great apple pie, but they don’t know how to market it, or how much money they need to run a business or how to operate it.”

Yet some will still plunge into the business — and plenty will fail. According to research by H.G. Parsa, a professor in Ohio State University’s Hospitality Management program, one in four restaurants closes or changes hands within the first year. Over the next three years, the sell-or-fail rate soars to three in five. The “good” news: The numbers are standard with most new businesses, according to the Small Business Administration and the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But as you consider those odds, remember that a resort town can heighten the challenge. RehobothFoodie.com, a popular blog that offers

news and reviews about coastal restaurants, has made note of seven restaurants in downtown Rehoboth that closed within a year or two of opening. Indeed, the “Breaking Chews” section of the website reported in June that America’s Pie, soon to open in the ocean-block space formerly occupied by the short-lived Lexie’s and then the short-lived Uncle Louie’s, will add yet another slice of pizza life to the first block of Rehoboth Avenue (now sporting Grotto, Nicola Pizza, Louie’s and Dough Roller).

If your dream job involves owning a restaurant at the beach, here are some tips to consider before you sign the lease. As Carrie Leishman, president and CEO of the Delaware Restaurant Association, advises, “Buckle up and go in with your head on straight.”

#### Get a taste for the business

Dining out a lot or holding frequent dinner parties demonstrates an appreciation for good food, but it doesn’t ensure success in the restaurant business. “Like any other career, you need to train

Dining out a lot or holding frequent dinner parties demonstrates an appreciation for good food, but it doesn’t ensure success in the restaurant business. **“Like any other career, you need to train for it and put in your time to succeed.”**

for it and put in your time to succeed,” says Grapski, who helped open restaurants in Palm Springs, Calif., and New Orleans before joining mentor Kevin Reading at Nage in 2004. (He became the sole owner in 2010.) “My first piece of advice is don’t think about owning a restaurant until you’ve worked in a restaurant for at least one full year,” he says.

Experience in a commercial kitchen or restaurant dining room is particularly important at the beach. “Tourists can be really harsh when doing reviews on Yelp or Trip Advisor because they have only one or two weeks to go out, and they want to make sure they’ve made good choices,” says Meghan Gardner, who with husband Lion and two other partners owns the Blue Moon in Rehoboth Beach. Gardner, who studied religion in college, worked her way up from busing to serving to managing the Blue Moon before buying it.

While owner-chefs operate several coastal restaurants, it’s just as important to know how to handle payroll as it is to handle filo dough. Grapski would like to see more management classes in traditional culinary school programs.

Mike Clampitt, who in 2013 purchased Po’ Boys Creole & Fresh Catch in Milton, gained solid experience in bookkeeping, inventory and management while working as the executive chef at Baywood Greens, a public golf club in Long Neck. He knew the cost of running the front (dining room) and back (kitchen) of the “house.” A former chef at the Blue Moon, he’s been in the restaurant business since he was 15.

Even so, when he decided to explore entrepreneurship, the Johnson & Wales University graduate consulted the Small Business Development Center in Georgetown and enrolled in classes offered by SCORE, a nonprofit association, supported by the U.S. Business Administration, that helps small businesses start and grow. “I wanted to know exactly what I had to do instead of going into it without any kind of information,” he explains.

#### Steeped in the local flavor

If you’re not experienced or not planning to be a hands-on owner, you’ll need savvy managers. When Eden changed hands in 2006, much of the staff stayed on, says Gardner, whose husband was then the executive chef at the Rehoboth Beach restaurant.

Grapski says a staff of full-time residents is key along the coast, given its many small communities. Thanks to the relationships he’s built over the past 10 years, he can easily spread the word about Crooked Hammock’s opening. “People know you, and they know your business. Community relations are much more important than an ad in the paper.”

Gardner agrees: “You are the face of the business and there’s

that relationship you have with your guests.” Consider the Back Porch Cafe, where co-owner Keith Fitzgerald, who’s worked at the restaurant since 1974, often pulls double shifts at the season’s start. At Confucius, guests are greeted by Danielle Xiong, who owns the restaurant with her husband, Shawn.

Tucked in a tiny shopping center, surrounded by farmland, Po’ Boys gets 90 percent of its business from Milton-area residents, some of whom come in two to three times a week, Clampitt says. Cognizant of the local following, he held a free pig roast when he bought the restaurant, and about 400 people showed up. “I knew it would be OK,” he says of the ownership transition.

Such support is important to the Blue Moon too. It experiences strong tourism activity in season, but during the rest of the year, the locals “keep us going,” Gardner notes.

#### Biting off more than you can chew

Having enough money to get through the slow winter will largely depend on how low one can keep operating costs from the start. Clampitt appreciated that the 30-seat Po’ Boys was already established, and the restaurant is so small, he’s just as likely to take your order as he is to cook it, which saves on labor.

Steve Hagen had a similar experience when he opened the 50-seat Off the Hook in 2009 with partner Kevin Frey. Since there’s an open kitchen, fronted by a bar, Hagen was the chef, host and part-time bartender in the Bethany Beach restaurant. Hagen’s partner has a background in construction, and the men did much of the renovation work themselves.

Keeping the menu manageable is another way to control costs. Consider Half Full in Lewes, owned by Ian Crandall, Matt DiSabatino and their wives, all of whom also own Kindle together. Half Full was launched in a small building with a tiny kitchen. Since Crandall’s wife, Joanna Goode, is a baker with a killer pizza dough recipe, Half Full started with just beer, wine, desserts and pizzas. A good deal of the business is takeout.

The eatery, which is adding salads and a few other dishes, recently moved to a structure built in the mid-to-late 1800s. Outfitting the space required extensive renovations to comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act and to raise the ceiling, yet also keep it in character with other historic buildings on Second Street.

For a restaurant owner, extensive construction is often the Pandora’s box of the profession. Meg Hudson, for instance, had planned to open Lula Brazil, located in the old Cloud 9 space in Rehoboth Beach, by Memorial Day 2014. She took possession in December 2013, and spent the winter doing renovations, which included plumbing, painting, floor refinishing, drywall patching and a lot of scrubbing. The cold weather that year put her contractors





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behind schedule. Then she waited for the fire marshal's approval — and waited. She resubmitted drawings upon request, then waited another three to four weeks. She eventually got the restaurant open by late August. The delays cost her time and, during the season, money.

Even moving into a suitable existing space can present issues if you make

Despite an increasing number of full-time residents, beach restaurants still have only 16 to 20 weeks to make the bulk of their money for the year.

changes without checking the regulations. Grapski cites the restaurant that added a wood-fired pizza oven only to learn after the fact that it wasn't permitted. It was just before Memorial Day and the restaurant couldn't open as planned.

Because Delaware laws have not kept up with the popularity of food trucks, Grapski is now lobbying for food-truck-friendly laws. Taco Reho, the company's food truck, is regularly parked outside of Big Chill Surf Cantina because such trucks are now limited to private property or festivals.

When Grapski decided to expand Nage, he didn't realize he had to pay an impact fee to the county for the extra stress the addition would put on the sewer system. It cost him thousands of unanticipated dollars. Now wiser, he's built the fee into the Crooked Hammock's construction budget.

"Those are things you don't think about," Hagen acknowledged. "You're thinking about soup and a menu concept and who you're going to hire." He was bewildered when his accountant mentioned a "gross receipts tax." "But I paid my taxes," Hagen told him. Turns out, he hadn't paid them all: The Delaware gross receipts tax is a tax on the total gross revenues of a business, regardless of the source. There are no deductions for the cost of goods or property sold, material or labor costs, interest expense, delivery costs, state or federal taxes.

### Crunch the numbers

Despite an increasing number of full-time area residents, beach restaurants still have only 16 to 20 weeks to make the bulk of their money for the year. But even if your restaurant is packed and there's a lengthy waiting list, you might not be building a hefty bank account.

For starters, don't count on a bank for full funding upfront unless you have collateral, says Grapski, who put his savings into Nage. Clampitt bought Po' Boys with his own money plus a loan.

What's more, in a good year, restaurant profit margins average around 5 percent, says Leishman of the Delaware Restaurant Association. "Labor and food costs are so high," she explains. "It's very expensive to own a restaurant." That also includes rent, equipment costs and maintenance, insurance, utilities and marketing.

Food costs have only gone up since Hagen opened his first restaurant in 2009. Like Off the Hook, two of his other restaurants — Just Hooked in Fenwick Island and Hooked in Ocean City — are influenced by the price of seafood, which, in turn, is affected by the cost of the fuel it takes to catch the seafood. As a result, Hooked Up Ale House and Raw Bar in Millville offers a pub menu with burgers and wings. The newly opened ale house has \$8 to \$15 menu items vs. the \$20 to \$28 entrees at its sister restaurants.

For Hudson's Brazilian concept, she initially had to drive to Philadelphia once a week, and sometimes more often, to buy specialty ingredients. She had no idea how busy she'd be in those first few months and didn't want to over-order. (Unlike a clothing boutique, a restaurant can't discount unsold product. It simply

goes to waste.) Now that she's found her footing, she can order larger amounts and get a discount on bulk.

And no matter how much money you think you'll need to survive the slow winter season, double it. Leishman says many restaurants open without enough funds to cover all the unexpected costs of the first year. And at the beach, "if you get a few lean winters, that can be a problem," she notes.

Lula Brazil, which has a nightclub component, did a decent business in the first few months after it opened. Then winter hit. There were nights when the restaurant had no customers, Hudson said. Fortunately, the dance club, which is less expensive to run, helped bring in revenue while would-be diners cocooned at home. The space has also been ideal for parties and wedding receptions.

Hudson planned to close for a month or two in winter, which for some owners is part of the appeal of starting a coastal restaurant. But her late opening meant ditching those plans to hopefully make more money in the off-season.

Winter closings are happening less often as activity increases in the shoulder seasons. Staying open also allows restaurants to keep staff instead of rehiring and retraining each May, and for some owners, that's worth barely breaking even or losing money for a few months in winter.

### Keep a lid on the drama

Of course, there are some employees you may not want back. Staff, chefs and partners don't always get along, and while that is a recipe for good reality TV, it also has the makings of a migraine, particularly when you add demanding customers to the mix. >

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Lula Brazil owner Meg Hudson, standing, checks on diners at her Rehoboth Beach restaurant. Seated, from left, are Erica McCants, of Alexandria, Va., Miguel Sanchez, of Wilmington, and Lisette Garcia and Craig Bennett, both of Manassas, Va.

“Everything is so dramatic,” Hagen says. “It’s like you are making life-and-death decisions.” Not surprisingly, tempers start simmering when the pressure is on.

Like an old married couple, Hagen and his business partner have agreed to work things out before the end of the day. They’ve also learned to walk away rather than continue a hot debate. “Let cooler heads prevail,” he advises.

Hagen couldn’t imagine being in business with a spouse. But that’s exactly what Meghan and Lion Gardner are doing, and so are their partners, Tim Ragan and Randy Hane, who recently married.

Gardner said it was challenging at first to work with her husband when he joined Blue Moon as the chef and she was the general manager. But while Joyce Felton owned the restaurant, they stuck to their primary areas of expertise. Now that they’re stakeholders in the entire operation, they often take the job home with them, checking reviews online, doing paperwork and placing orders at 11 p.m. or before 8 a.m. They’ve learned how to communicate so their restaurant roles don’t create friction.

Crandall says each of the four partners at Kindle and Half Full has a distinct role. DiSabatino excels in the front of the house. “He knows everybody in town and shakes their hand,” Crandall notes. Ali DiSabatino handles the books. Crandall is the chef and Goode is the baker. Despite the coordination challenges, Crandall has no

desire right now to start another restaurant on his own. “I like the partnership and the way it’s set up,” he says simply.

Siblings are another matter. When his brother worked at Kindle, the two men learned there was less brotherly love when one of them was the boss. “Proceed with caution,” he warns about such hiring decisions.

#### Embrace the whole enchilada

The restaurant business is sprinkled with risk. Hudson took a chance on a Brazilian concept that focused more on seafood and tropical ingredients, such as coconut milk and yucca, than steak. “Once people come in, they understand what it is,” she says. “That’s the best marketing. They tell their friends and bring friends. The food is approachable.”

Certainly, standing out can be an advantage. Grapski of Nage says one reason Agave in Lewes commands a two-hour wait list is because it’s the only Mexican concept restaurant in town. However, a place like Lewes, which is more sedate than Rehoboth, might not support a restaurant featuring cutting-edge dishes with unusual ingredients and prepared with novel tools (like liquid nitrogen). Nage brought innovative cuisine to the highway, but in the off-season, locals might think of it only for a special occasion. A casual option such as Big Chill Surf Cantina, also on the highway, meets the need for a low price

point. It’s also accessible during the tourist season, when finding parking in town is a challenge.

And at the beach, chefs and owners can’t stubbornly stick to a concept that isn’t working. They have to listen to their guests — there are simply too many options out there to remain obstinate. Today, the clientele is more engaged than in the past, Gardner

“I mop the floor every other night and I say to myself, ‘Oh, my god, I own a restaurant.’ It’s an awesome feeling.”

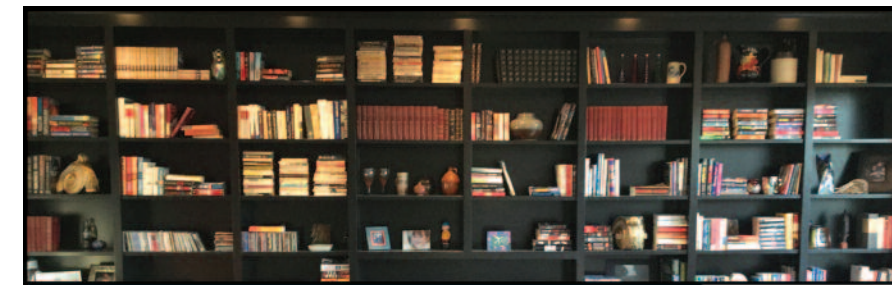
says. “They want you to tell the story of where the food comes from and where the wine comes from.” Because she and Lion are well versed in this area from traveling to wineries and food destinations, she finds customers’ interest exciting. She just has to make sure her staff is equally knowledgeable and passionate. Customers are informed enough to catch a fib.

Finally, to even venture into the restaurant business requires humility. “You have to be prepared to do every position, from janitorial to washing dishes,” says Hudson, who describes her first year in the business as a roller coaster ride with the highest highs and lowest lows.

You also must love the hospitality business, she adds. Grapski agrees. He points to Steve “Monty” Montgomery, co-owner of the Starboard in Dewey Beach. “That guy just loves to host people and for them to have a good time — it’s his passion.”

Now in his second year, Clampitt has no regrets about his decision to buy Po’ Boys. “To be honest, it’s probably the best thing I’ve ever done,” he says. “I mop the floor every other night and I say to myself, ‘Oh, my God, I own a restaurant.’ It’s an awesome feeling.” ■

PAM GEORGE is a frequent contributor to *Delaware Beach Life* — and the local restaurant economy. She is the author of “*First State Plates: Iconic Delaware Restaurants and Recipes*,” and she has a Facebook page, “*Small Wonder, Big Bites*,” which is devoted to the Delaware dining scene, particularly at the beach. She divides her time between Wilmington and Lewes.



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# A Place at the

# Table

Created at a time when the town was divided, CAMP Rehoboth marks 25 years as an integral — and edifying — part of the community

BY PAM GEORGE | PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT NATHAN

The summer of 2015 started with a bang. Police issued citations for public alcohol consumption on Poodle Beach, a longtime gathering spot for gays, prompting some to claim that they were being unfairly targeted. There was also an unsuccessful attempt to restrict swimming pool use on rental properties, mostly due to noise concerns.

In cases like those, Steve Elkins would like to see all concerned parties “brought to the table” to discuss the issues and suggest solutions. Twenty-five years ago, however, he wouldn’t have received an invitation to enter the meeting room, let alone be offered a seat at any such table.

Elkins is the co-founder of CAMP Rehoboth, founded back then to bring gay and straight community stakeholders together to create a safe, welcoming environment for everyone who appreciates the area. “I always found that you could accomplish much more when you look at what you have in common rather than look at your differences,” he says.

CAMP Rehoboth leaders, from left, Chris Beagle, Murray Archibald, Steve Elkins and Salvatore Seeley gather in the CAMP courtyard on Baltimore Avenue.







Celebrating the July 2009 signing of the law that added sexual orientation to the list of prohibited discriminatory practices in Delaware are, from left: Steve Elkins of CAMP Rehoboth, state Rep. Pete Schwartzkopf, Drew Fennell of the Delaware ACLU, Gov. Jack Markell and state Sen. Dave Sokola.

Although it might sound a tad utopian to skeptics — or a relic from the hippie counterculture — CAMP Rehoboth's approach has worked. A quarter-century after the organization's founding, the LGBT community not only has a voice in Rehoboth, but policymakers — some of whom are themselves gay — are listening. "Today, we're equal partners," Elkins says. And that, he adds, is one of CAMP's greatest accomplishments.

There have been many achievements throughout that 25-year history, from raising awareness about AIDS and HIV-prevention to lobbying for anti-discrimination legislation and same-sex marriage to conducting sensitivity training for police officers.

CAMP Rehoboth (the half-acronym name stands for "Create A More Positive Rehoboth") is the brainchild of Elkins and partner Murray Archibald, who became concerned about the backlash against the growing gay population in 1990, when bumper stickers stating "Keep Rehoboth a Family Town" — perceived as an anti-gay slogan — began appearing on cars around the city. "So many more gays were coming to town and spending the summer here, and each summer they were more and more out in the open," Archibald recalls.

It was a different — and for some, a more threatening — time. The Strand, a predominately gay disco on Rehoboth Avenue, was two years old, and The Renegade, another dance club just outside town that catered to a gay clientele, was in full swing. "We were getting a lot of pushback," says Archibald, who came up with the idea for CAMP Rehoboth — or CAMP,

for short — while sitting in his artist studio. "We needed a place for mediation to negotiate concerns." He and Elkins founded the organization to improve relations between residents, tourists, merchants, politicians and police.

The nonprofit has gone from a one-person staff with an annual budget of less than \$50,000 to a staff of seven with an annual budget that tops \$1 million. (The funding comes from private donations, fundraising events, advertising revenue from the *Letters From CAMP Rehoboth* publication, and an annual membership campaign that brings in more than \$250,000 a year. The organization also has a \$108,000 contract with the state for HIV/AIDS programming.) CAMP has grown from a tiny office on Baltimore Avenue, where everyone bumped elbows, into a community center complex with a library, conference rooms, galleries, a multipurpose room that can hold nearly 180 people, a kitchen and a courtyard. *Letters*, published 15 times a year, has grown from four pages per issue to more than 120.

Ahead of CAMP's "Silverbration Celebration Weekend," which includes a "Silver Gala" on Friday, Oct. 9, and a "Silver Block Party" on Sunday, Oct. 11, *Delaware Beach Life* talked to Elkins, who became executive director in 1993 when the first director left; Archibald, president of the board; Salvatore Seeley, the program director of CAMPSafe (an HIV/AIDS prevention program) and manager of the organization's health and wellness programs; and Chris Beagle, vice president of the board, who started volunteering at CAMP in 2006.

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(Interviews were edited for flow and brevity.)

#### What were the challenges facing CAMP in 1990?

Archibald: The first step was to organize a group, and we did a workshop at The Strand, [the back of which] was across the street from where we are now [37 Baltimore Ave.]. We got a lot of good ideas and moved forward with getting our [nonprofit status] and writing up the mission and goals. We had some advice, but no one had started an organization like the one we were talking about. The idea was to make Rehoboth a better community. Part of that included fundraising, networking. It also included artistic expression, education and outreach. We also talked about building a community space and building a complex. People were rolling their eyes and saying, "You can't put all those goals together."

We got *Letters From CAMP* started, so we had a means of communication. We got the board together. As we got 10 years into the organization, we started to talk about the property itself and the idea of expanding into a full community center. We grew into the vision, even when we didn't know that we were.

#### In 1993, when CAMP was still new, five men attacked three gay men on the boardwalk, leaving one with a permanent injury. How did that affect the organization?

Elkins: The chamber of commerce and city officials wanted to sweep it under the rug because it was negative publicity, that type of thing. I worked with then-Police Chief Creig Doyle, and we said: "We're not going to accept that. There might not be hate crime legislation that would cover this, but we're going to find a way to [get that enacted]." And he said he was going to treat it as though it were a hate crime. That forced the city officials, both business leaders and political leaders, to finally say, "You're right. Enough is enough."

[The culprits, three of whom were juveniles, received sentences of confinement or community service, although the adult who pleaded guilty and testified against the others got probation.]

That was a galvanizing point. It mobilized the community.

#### Delaware added sexual orientation to its hate crime law in 1997. What did that mean to you?

Elkins: It was one of the earliest times that I felt we'd made a difference. Gov. Thomas Carper chose to sign the hate crimes legislation in front of the police station in Rehoboth Beach, and he invited me to sit at the table while he did that. That was one of the proudest early achievements.

#### AIDS and HIV were also a primary focus in the early years. How have CAMP's health initiatives grown in the past 25 years?

Seeley: I was hired in 2000 to do the HIV-prevention program, which at that time was really just doing condom distribution in the bars and beach houses. It was primarily a summer program. Then I did some other stuff for CAMP — helping to answer the phones and filling in. I think there were four of us working in a space that was about 200 square feet. Over the years, [we moved] from condom distribution and outreach to also doing HIV testing and counseling and then sexual health counseling. It was exciting to be part of that.

More and more people were relocating here, and we were getting a lot more calls. "Where can I find a LGBT-friendly doctor — eye doctor, chiropractor, psychiatrist or regular practitioner?" I talked to Steve and we decided to look at health and wellness programs. I was going back to school for my licensed clinical social worker — my master's — degree. It became a perfect fit. I graduated, and that's when we started doing some more programs. We started a men's discussion

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group, a women's discussion group and a youth group. We put together a resource and referral guide for people calling in for doctors. We started offering a free mental health counseling program for people who had no insurance or who were under-insured.

This was in 2005, and things were happening quickly. We started building some great relationships with Beebe Healthcare and working with them on LGBT issues in the hospital. I sat on some committees to do sensitivity training and develop the first LGBT guidelines for patients.

When CAMP moved to a bigger building, we could do some health fairs and flu clinics with Beebe Healthcare. We had the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs] come in to talk to our gay vets about benefits.

When we started getting asked to sit on these committees for public health, Beebe and United Way, I said, "Wow, we're known throughout the state of Delaware." I've had tons of these "aha" moments. It's being invited to do workshops and lectures and give presentations at conferences ... and seeing other agencies using our [HIV awareness] materials or including our materials in their presentations. It's like, "Oh, my God, we are doing good work and meaningful work to reach our communities."

**What about women's health? At one time, the stereotype was that CAMP was only for males.**

Seeley: We do a lot more women's programs than men's programs, believe it or not. With our female community members in mind, we started [a volunteer program to help cancer patients



Kathy Wiz, a CAMP Rehoboth board member, speaks to the crowd gathered for the Broadwalk on the Boardwalk (an event intended to raise awareness of breast cancer). The walk was part of the nonprofit group's Women's FEST in April 2014.

who don't have family in the area. Volunteers give patients rides to treatment or do their grocery shopping.] It started with our female community members and now it's evolved to include men and women.

**Chris, how did you get involved?**

Beagle: I started volunteering at CAMP in 2006. I've been on the board since 2009. Advocacy has always been important to me

personally. One of the important things we do at CAMP is advocacy. The nondiscrimination legislation [was] first and then civil union and marriage — transgender rights. We really try to do everything we can.

On July 2, 2009, the governor of the state [Jack Markell] signed [legislation that outlaws discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation] at CAMP Rehoboth. At that time, efforts had been undertaken for nearly a decade to get it to that point. It says a lot about the impact CAMP Rehoboth has had on these efforts in the state to have him sign the bill there. It was momentous for a lot of us. Certainly something I'll never forget.

Equality Delaware approached CAMP Rehoboth to be a partner to mobilize efforts and volunteers throughout the state [for the civil union bill]. I remember when I testified [at Legislative Hall in Dover] for the civil union bill. There were testimonies for and testimonies against it. I was extremely proud to be in the group that testified for it. I sat there and looked up at the dome and thought: "Here I am, a scrawny, lonely kid from central Pennsylvania who never dreamed he'd be given the opportunity to speak for this legislation, this most important effort." I remember thinking at that moment: "I am no longer in the minority." As I've often said, I never considered myself a militant activist, so to speak, but I got involved in this first and foremost to have a voice for my husband, Eric, and I. We'll celebrate 26 years in September, and I'm only 49 years old. There are a lot of people who need a voice.

**Given the recent racial tension the country has experienced, we know that discrimination doesn't stop once laws get passed. Is there still unrest when it comes to sexual discrimination?**

Beagle: I was asked the day the Supreme Court decision came down [declaring that same-sex marriage was legal in all 50 states], what's next? I was so emotionally vested in that moment that I missed the opportunity to say that as wonderful as it is that any loving couple — regardless if they're the same sex or not — can now get married in this country, in a majority of states, you could still go to work on Monday and get fired for your sexual orientation. Having nondiscrimination protection is paramount to our community now. That's certainly where we need to focus our efforts in terms of priority. >



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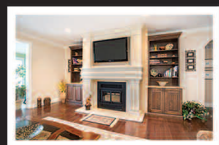
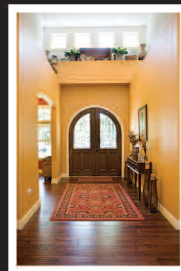
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Seeley: I think our transgender community here in Delaware is the next community that we need to work with to make sure discrimination doesn't exist in the workplace. We have laws here in Delaware, but there's still a lot of homophobia and transgender phobia that still does exist.

**Even in the gay community, is there discrimination against transgender people?**

Seeley: Yes. I think there is. Part of what we're trying to do now is start a new program for men and women who are transitioning and don't have the financial resources to get free clothing. There's still a lot of misunderstanding about where the transgender community fits in with the lesbian and gay community. Our job now is to alleviate some of those misconceptions and get information out there to our community so we don't discriminate in our own LGBT rainbow. The needs are so different.

**How did transgender become part of the lesbian and gay umbrella?**

Seeley: Way, way back in the 1960s, when the sexual revolution and the gay rights liberation movement started, everything got lumped into the lesbian-gay-bi-transgender rainbow. Now that Caitlyn Jenner has come out, people are starting to say: "OK, we've really neglected the 'T' in our community. How do we focus on providing resources and programming for that population?"

Archibald: [In March,] we had a transgender service honoring people all over the world who'd lost their lives [to transphobia]. It's one of those areas I think everybody has to work harder at — gay and straight.

Lumping LGBT together sounds nice, but there are still different groups. You can put people together in broad categories, but within those categories, people are as diverse as in the rest of the world. You might think all gay people are Democrats, but that's not true. There's a wide mix of political views, backgrounds and cultures. A lot of people live on their little edge of a circle and don't see what's on the other side of the circle. CAMP gets to interact with a full circle of people, who don't always know each other. Every one of those groups has an opinion on what CAMP should be and do. Finding the way to reach the most people is not an easy thing to do.



The CAMP Rehoboth logo represents the organization's mission to be "the heart of the community," according to co-founder Murray Archibald.

Many of us know about the Rehoboth Art League's space restrictions and its inability to expand on its Henlopen Acres site. The art league recently opened a satellite site on Route 9. You don't face the same zoning issues as the RAL, but is there a concern due to congestion downtown that you might need another location?

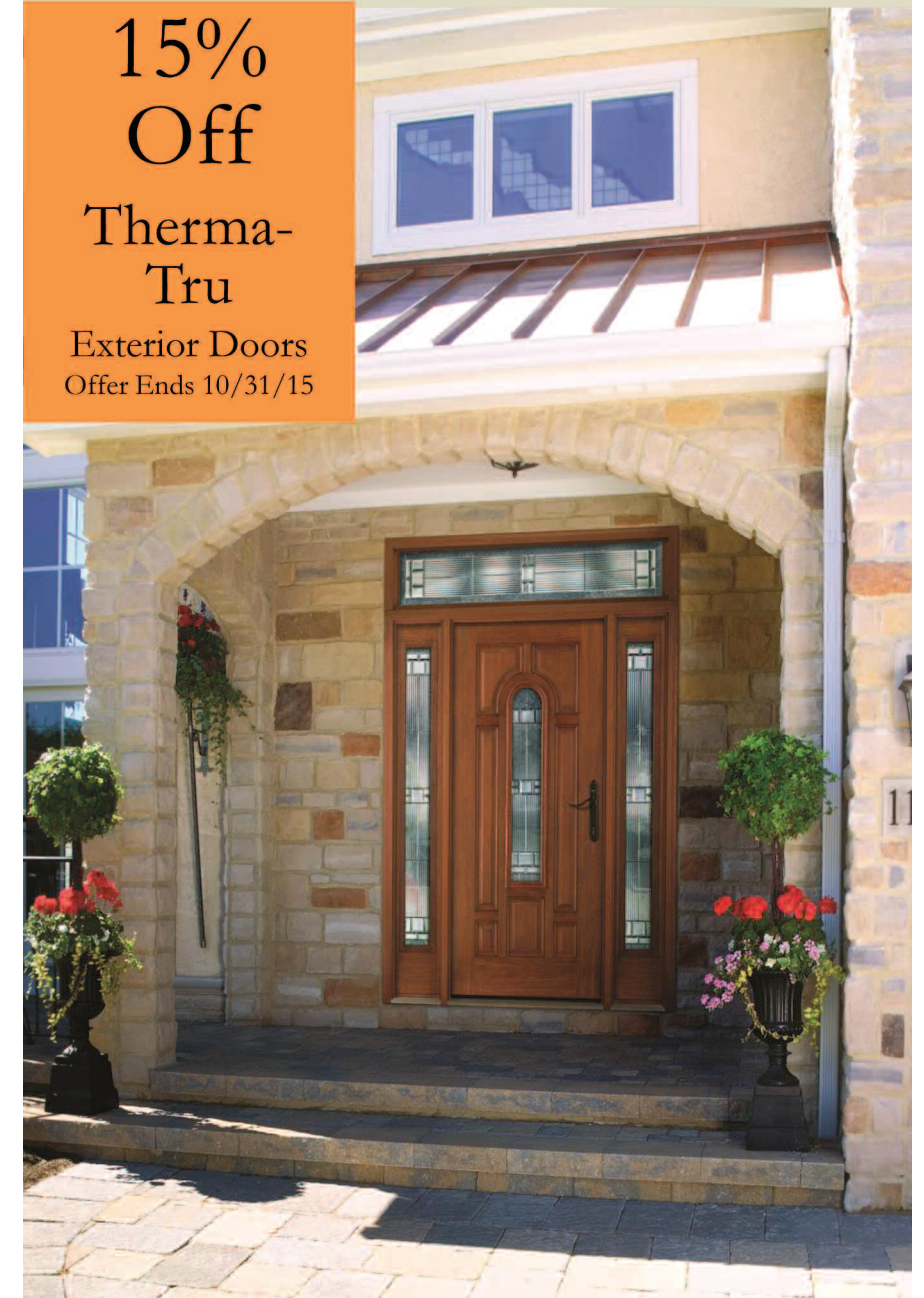
Elkins: It's challenging, but we made a decision back in 2000, when we bought 39 Baltimore — now we have 37 and 39 — and started plans to expand and have a community center, to have a stake here and be in the heart of the community. The decision was made and there was no turning back. We have no intention of having a satellite location. But we do work with other organizations, like the art league or film society or many other nonprofits in the area, to have satellite events or programs. The men's group meets every other week at Epworth United Methodist Church [just outside Rehoboth] because there's parking.

Our mission was to be the heart of the community — and make it be a safe and inclusive community — and we think we can do that by being part of downtown Rehoboth.

Archibald: The idea that came out of one of our early workshops was to be the heart of the community, and our logo has a house with a heart in it. It's all about creating a home or home away from home for anybody who needs it. People know they can call us for help, whether it's a gay issue or not, and we'll send them in the right direction. So many people in their work life might still be living in the closet, so we're a place they can turn to when they need it. >

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Do you think that younger people in the LGBT community realize what things were like in the 1990s, when CAMP was founded and how much has changed?

Elkins: Even when we were coming here as weekenders in the 1980s, we didn't stop to think that there's somebody doing all these things to make [Rehoboth] wonderful. I think the younger generation, as they get more mature and into their lifestyle, will start to realize it's not just magic. There's somebody behind the curtain who's worked to make it safe. Every once in a while the young people will come and say: "We really appreciate what you guys have done for us."

Beagle: I hope I live long enough to see a day when it's not a big deal and they don't understand what it was like because

### The Gaying of Rehoboth

To read a comprehensive history of the evolution of the gay community in Rehoboth, buy a back issue of the October 2009 edition of *Delaware Beach Life* (or find it in local libraries). The story, titled "The Gaying of Rehoboth," was written by Fay Jacobs, who won an award for it in the public issues category of a national magazine-writing competition. Back issues are available at [delawarebeachlife.com/shop/single-issues](http://delawarebeachlife.com/shop/single-issues). ■

it would mean that we've come so far and they're treated equally in every facet of their life. My godson will be 15, and his outlook on the world is so different than ours was at that age. I'm thrilled for that. He's grown up watching his uncles, who've loved him for his entire life, and they're not abnormal. It's not wrong. It's not immoral. He just happens to have two uncles. Our mission at CAMP Rehoboth is to move forward for all of us. We certainly hope people have an appreciation, but ultimately, we want to see a world that's fair and equal for all of us. ■

PAM GEORGE, a frequent contributor to *Delaware Beach Life*, has also been published in *Fortune*, *US Airways Magazine*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Men's Health*.

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