

The Monocacy MONOCLE

Keeping An Eye On Local News

Passion for Pictures and Pastures

By Dominique Agnew
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Lee Langstaff has been taking photographs of the beauty of the Agricultural Reserve because she loves taking pictures, she loves the Ag Reserve, and she wants to share these loves with others. These passions recently culminated in a highly-successful multimedia art show entitled "Rustic Roads: A Journey through the MoCo Ag Reserve" at the Black Rock Center for the Arts this past October in conjunction with fiber artist Dalis Davidson and painter/drawer Tina Thieme-Brown. The propagation of the passion didn't start out so ambitious; it was a simple, slightly selfish (in a good way) loving endeavor that brought her to this point.

The story behind the propagation began a few years ago on her brother's farm even though she has been an avid photographer ever since her youth. In the 1990s, her brother purchased a farm in Comus at the base of Sugarloaf Mountain. At the time, Lee was living in Georgetown and was going out to the country on weekends. "I was always the farm outdoorsy person," she says, then she laughed at the paradox of her brother on the farm and her in

the city. "How did he get the farm, and I lived in Georgetown?" She helped him and his family get the farm started with



Lee Langstaff

gardens and animals. A few years later, she decided to make the move and found a cottage to rent right next to her brother's

farm, but he and his family decided to move into town so the kids could attend schools downtown, at the same time,

they would begin a renovation of the buildings including rebuilding the house. Lee became worried. "What if they forget how beautiful it is?" was her question and driving mission. She began taking more and more pictures to keep her brother from forgetting. She made calendars for the children. She took pictures of Sugarloaf Mountain, pictures of the kids with the animals, pictures of the landscape through the change of the seasons and through the changes of the crops. So far, she is succeeding in her mission.

One of her neighbors is Melanie Choukas-Bradley, a strong proponent of the Ag Re-

serve who has written numerous articles to raise awareness of the preciousness of the rural lands in Montgomery County and who was the publicist for Celebrate Rural Montgomery, the year-long celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the inception of the Ag Reserve. One day, Melanie asked Lee for permission to come take photographs of Sugarloaf Mountain from her home for the website. It was the middle of winter, and the view was less than spectacular. Lee mentioned that she had thousands of photographs—a star was born.

For her real job, Lee is a professional mediator and facilitator for environmental and natural resource issues. She holds a bachelor's degree in zoology from Connecticut College and a master's in natural resources from the University of Michigan. She has training as



Sugarloaf Mountain, by Lee Langstaff

a mediator and always works on environmental issues. Some of the cases she has worked on have been about drinking water or sustainable marine fisheries. She has also traveled to other countries under her professional guise.

Lee also manages her brother's farm. She grows organic vegetables, and she raises sheep for wool and meat, chickens, and other fowl. The sheep came as a result of knitting. "I backed up from the knitting end," she says. After learning how to knit, she learned how to spin, and finally began raising sheep. She now sells wool to other hand-knitters, and she shows her sheep and photography work at the Sheep and Wool Festival in Howard County. And on that

farm, she takes pictures. She especially loves capturing children involved in rural life, and she is thrilled when she captures what she calls the intimacies of nature. For example, one of her prints from the exhibit at Black Rock encompassed the bloom of a pumpkin with a honeybee at the very center. "I wanted to reflect the intimacy of the agricultural aspect," she says. "Honeybees are so important to agriculture." She also likes to show products in her photos such as eggs or tomatoes (she grows many varieties of heirloom tomatoes in her garden every year). Other details she has captured are the beauty of the tomato horn worm up close, the back of the neck of a peacock, and the shell of a box

turtle.

At the opposite end of these minute details are Lee's stunning landscapes. "Some people think of agricultural landscapes as static," she says, "but they're very dynamic." From the different seasons to the different times of day to the different crops and their stages of growth, she has captured so much of this energy in her photographs. "Every day you wake up and there's something different," she adds. In her biography, Lee wrote, "My hope is that my photographs will resonate for those who also see and cherish these things, and that it might lead others to notice things that they may not have noticed before, that they may become more aware of the

richness and beauty that is accessible to us, in part because of the agricultural Reserve."

The art exhibit at Black Rock was very successful and was very well-received. Between the three artists, they were able to highlight the art of the Ag Reserve and bring awareness of that irreplaceable natural beauty to a larger, more diverse audience. She looks forward to being involved in another exhibit sometime in the near future, but she has no definite plans yet. At any rate, it's almost lambing season, and she won't have time to think about exhibits for a few weeks. Many of her Lee's pictures can be seen on the Celebrate Rural Montgomery website: <http://ruralmontgomery.org>.



Photograph by Lee Langstaff