

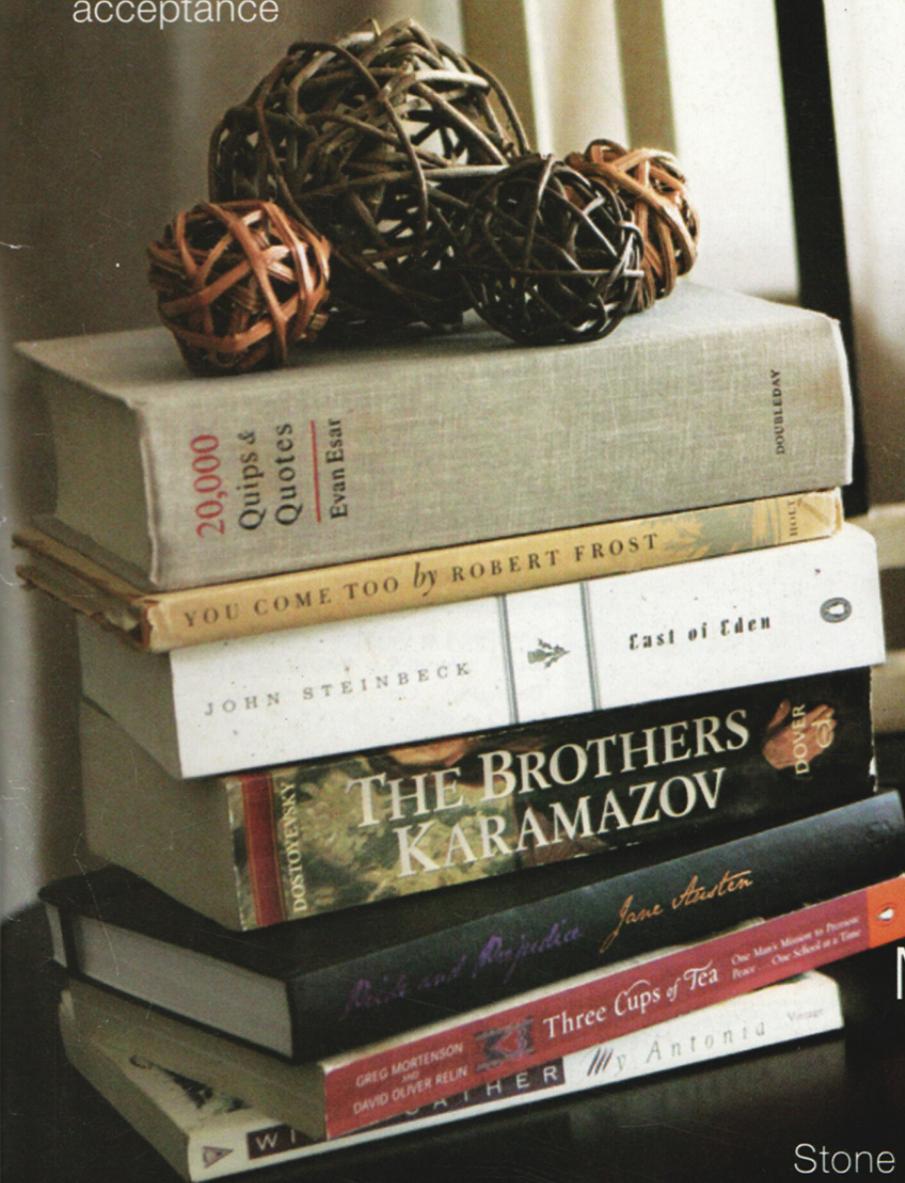
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Feb/March 2010
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Story by Diane Silcox-Jarrett
Photos by Amy Free



Above | LaVern Oxendine has made a home in downtown Fayetteville thanks to a little help from his friends, including designer Lynn Leath.



rowing up on his grandmother's farm, the golden tobacco fields of Robeson County were LaVern Oxendine's back yard.

Now it is full of city lights.

"I grew up with the earth around me," he said. "I guess that's why I chose earth tones when it came to deciding on colors I wanted for my new home."

And indeed the warm reds, browns and oranges of his loft high above the downtown streets of Fayetteville recall an earlier time on the farm near Pembroke. Many things have changed for Oxendine since those childhood days. He is now executive director of Family Alternatives Inc., a Lumberton agency providing services to people across southeastern North Carolina with behavioral health needs. Oxendine sees his work as a mission to children and adults challenged by mental health and developmental disabilities. In fact, his job keeps him so busy that he decided last summer that it might be time to give up the house and yard life.

In June, Oxendine moved into 300 Hay, the condominium complex in the heart of downtown. Walk out onto one of his balconies for a view of Hay Street United Methodist Church or the businesses and restaurants scattered below. The loft is surprisingly spacious; with three bedrooms, he is able to have his own office and a

set out to open their own chimney sweep business. It gained instant popularity due partly to the couple's embrace of the mythical top hat and fingerless glove-wearing chimney sweep that most Americans became aware of through the 1964 Disney film "Mary Poppins." Plus, the couple's charming British accents didn't hurt either.

"(John) wore the chimney sweep costume, and it really helped to market the business since many people didn't know what a chimney sweep was," Margaret said. "But eventually we had to put the costume away. It's actually dangerous to wear this big top hat while working in a chimney."

Soon after opening, the couple decided to try their hand at a retail location, selling chimney-related products out of their Grove Street store.

"We soon began to realize that people who buy chimneys also need glass doors, grates and accessories," said Margaret. "And of course, we sell custom fireplaces as well."

The business has had to evolve with changing tastes, such as the rising popularity of gas fireplaces over the traditional wood fireplace.

"It used to be that we'd have one gas fireplace in our selection, but today they make up about eight," Margaret said. "They really began to get popular in the 1990s. They're less messy, and though the gas costs more than buying wood, people just like the convenience of being able to simply push a button to get fire."

Though the Jammicks routinely saw a spike in business during the cold winter months, Fayetteville's sticky summers were slow. Once again, The Fireplace Placed adapted. The addition of outdoor awnings keeps the phone ringing well into August.

"We make the awnings and the fireplaces custom and high-end, that way Wal-Mart and Lowe's are never really competition, because they can't create these things custom like we can," Margaret said.

"They'll actually suggest us to their customers."

It's that attention to detail, plus an uncanny knack for adaptation, that keeps customers coming. 

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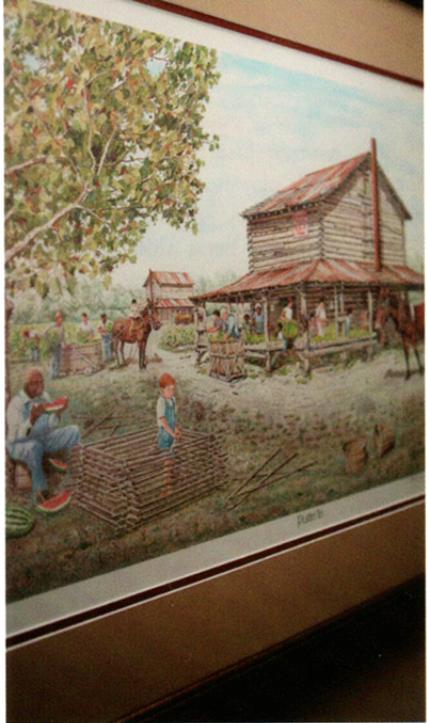
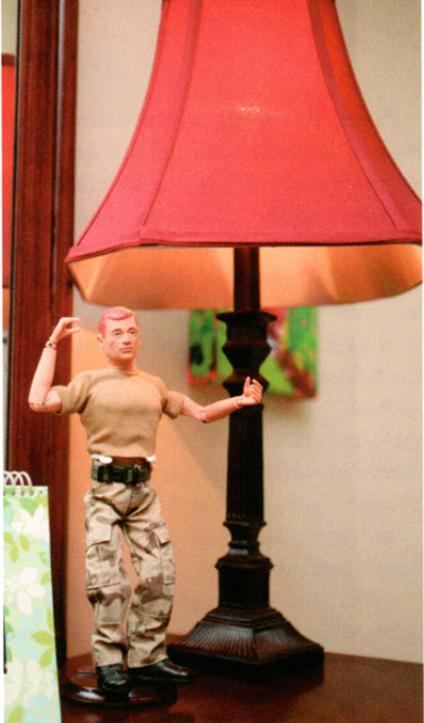
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Above | It's the personal touches that make Oxendine's 300 Hay apartment come alive, including paintings, a G.I. Joe figure from his boyhood and an old-fashioned percolator like the one his grandmother once owned.

Below | Designer Lynn Leath worked keepsakes in with the contemporary (and comfortable) furnishings.



spare room for guests. "Or storing a few things," Oxendine says and laughs.

The living room is equipped with a fireplace and space above for a flat-screen television, which is just what Oxendine plans to do with it. The kitchen has retro red and black lamps suspended from the ceiling above black granite counter tops. He even brought a retro touch to his appliances, choosing an old-fashioned percolator over a traditional coffee maker, just like the one he had growing up.

Oxendine gives much of the credit for these details to dear friend and designer Lynn Leath. She has woven in childhood keepsakes with more recent collectibles that hold personal significance for Oxendine. A G.I. Joe doll, a gift from Oxendine's paternal grandfather in 1969, is propped on his bedroom dresser. Prints from the outdoor drama "Strike at the Wind!" are displayed throughout the loft. A member of the Lumbee tribe, Oxendine served on its board of directors.

"The play has special meaning to me because it takes place near where I grew up and is about the history of Robeson County," Oxendine says. "It's a story about Native Americans, blacks and Caucasians living together and helping each other."

But most special to LaVern is a print called "Puttin' In" by Jerry Locklair. He points to the scene of children and adults working side by side, putting up a crop of tobacco.



Above | Native American prints are among Oxendine's most precious possessions.

"When I was young we had a mule pulling a crate just like that one. And we kids built play houses out of tobacco sticks, just like they are in the print."

Oxendine has been able to combine these memories of growing up in the country with loft living to give his home a relaxed, warm feeling. Thanks to some help from Leath, city and country have been brought together.

"LaVern had a great collection of American Indian art and earth-colored upholstery that was incorporated to give a calm and natural setting for a busy executive," Leath said. "The interior is set in the midst of gorgeous windows and streetscape views and treetops."

That city view is what he has become most fond of in his new surroundings. The views from his three balconies include each end of Hay Street, the Airborne & Special Operations Museum, and historic buildings of downtown.

"I am able to sit on the balcony and have a fantastic view of the fireworks on the Fourth of July, the Veterans Day Parade, and the Christmas celebrations that take place downtown. It's the best seat in the house and on Hay Street," he says and smiles. "And my friends know it, they love coming here and sitting on the balconies."

And should those friends tire of the view, all it takes are a few steps to a wide choice of restaurants, bars, coffee shops, plus a movie theater and library.

Loft living has another nice surprise: a built-in neighborhood.

"We see each other getting the mail and going to work in the morning," Oxendine says. "One of my neighbors is elderly, and we all pitch in to help her if she needs it." An excellent cook, the neighbor repays the favor by making homemade cakes. Maybe country customs have arrived in the city after all. **CV**

"LaVern had a great collection of American Indian art and earth-colored upholstery that was incorporated to give a calm and natural setting for a busy executive." -Lynn Leath

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