

BY MONICA YOUNG

Al and Anne Hartley, owners of Four Seasons Electric Boats at Dockside on the north end of Eatons Ferry Bridge, have loved their lake for a long time. A significant portion of family land was covered with water when the Corps of Engineers created Lake Gaston in 1963. In addition, the family still has a large piece of land bordering the lake that runs along the North Carolina/Virginia state line.

This rich history tied to the 43-year-old lake makes it fitting that the Hartleys have designed a new product line that pays tribute to life at the lake.

While Four Seasons specializes in their Duffy electric boats, famous for their smooth quiet ride that maximizes at a speed of seven mph, Al and Anne take pride in not being just another boat dealer. They want to promote Lake Gaston as a destination for fun and interest while giving more of a boutique feel to their business. They have added something new and different each year that makes for an interesting and entertaining experience for their clientele.

This year, tapping into the historical and personal connection to the area, Al and Anne have expanded their business with throws, note cards, posters and cutting/serving boards that feature



Anne and Al Hartley have created a boutique feel to their boat showroom with their unique specialty Lake Gaston product line.

More Than a Map - Lake Gaston Becomes Art

an original and beautiful depiction of Lake Gaston.

They collaborated with Tim Lee of Simply Tim Productions. Tim is not only a talented graphic artist and photographer; he also pitches in at the Four Seasons showroom.

The design features a deep green background bordered by flora and fauna found at Lake Gaston. The center of the design shows the lake snaking along the states' border and is labeled with the many creeks that feed the lake. As added appeal, they chose to retain the original spellings of locations as they were "back in the day, before the lake came to be" – Eaton's Ferry rather than Eatons Ferry, and a "d" in Pidgeon Roost Creek, for example.

"We wanted to focus on a Lake Gaston product line because people ask for things with a Lake Gaston theme. And fitting in with our business model, we decided it was time

to move forward with the idea," says Anne. "Tim and I worked on an idea that we hoped would make a connection. We wanted to create something that wasn't just a souvenir but things people on the lake and nearby would want in their homes."

The team pulled the design together in September and then began the challenge of finding manufacturers that could produce a quality product in the quantity that Four Seasons could manage at a price point that customers could afford. In addition, Anne and Al wanted to keep production in North Carolina as much as they could.

The result was finding a North Carolina weaver for the throws, getting Riverside Printing in Rocky Mount to produce the posters, the note cards printed at Chapel Hill Printing and Graphics and the cutting boards in Tennessee. They are searching more manufacturers for upcoming products like placemats and other home accent pieces. They also hope to add T-shirts and a beach towel line in the vivid design.

"We want feedback from the public about what they would like to see us do," says Anne.

So far, response has been positive. Their goal was to have products available for the holiday market. The note cards were available by Thanksgiving while the throws skidded in on December 23 just in time for Christmas.

That is when Doug Hughes, editor of the *Lake Gaston Gazette*, stumbled upon them. He had stopped in to wish Al Hartley a Merry Christmas when he spotted the throw.

"My wife is hot on Lake Gaston items so I bought it for a Christmas gift," says Doug. "It's a very nice piece of work."

As a result, he plans a feature on Lake Gaston products in the newspaper's *Lake Life* publication.

Area realtors are framing the posters for art in rental properties as are home owners.

"We just wanted to carry nice things for people to enjoy all year long. This differentiates us. These products are designed to appeal to everyone, not just the tourist trade," says Anne.

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