

Charles Street Gallery Celebrates 15 Years

Written by Lisa Annelouise Rentz
Tuesday, 16 July 2013 13:26



Sonny and Georgia Phillips established their gallery in downtown Beaufort fifteen years ago this month, after raising their family on Hilton Head Island, running an oyster factory, and renovating an 1850s church in Bluffton, among quite a few other adventures. Their gallery anchors the cultural scene and keeps standards high. Here are a few testimonials . . .

"They just nail it. They've got good energy. Walking up the stairs is exciting, the anticipation builds— who's up there, what's on the walls?"

— Rhonda Jordan, owner of Tabby Fabric & Studio

"Beaufort is lucky to have the Charles Street Gallery, which is set in a restored traditional house with a beautiful garden. Georgia and Sonny are more like art patrons. They are knowledgeable, kind, straightforward, and direct with no overt salesmanship or hype. Sonny is a gifted woodworker, and Georgia has an excellent eye for painting and is a craftsman for matting and

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framing artwork.

The exhibition openings are important occasions in Beaufort, replete with live music, wonderful food, genuine warmth, and are typically gatherings for buyers, artists, and Beaufort's artistic society." — artist Joan Templer

"Georgia and Sonny are the perfect blend of down to earth and astonishing erudition and sophistication." — musician Stan Boyd

"I have the honor of being their first customer. Our architect Joel Newman commissioned Sonny to make my dining room table base. That was the beginning of a long relationship of framing, art shows, hanging and a few Sonny-handmade treasures.

The quality of their framing and sense of subtle shades of mattboard and wood enhancements has made many of my art works better. I now say— how do I think I should frame this?

Sonny and Georgia are true assets to the community in terms of supporting community issues, schools, Hope Haven, choice. If you need them, they do their best. They are up to date for the goings on and ready to encourage art for community.

Funny story— Sonny once took a truckload full of papyrus he cut and kept watered and straight and drove to the Cummer museum in Jacksonville because my daughter was on the board and they were having an Egyptian show. True story.

Personally, he rescued me as I was stranded in Beaufort when I left my lights on in my jeep while I was having my hair done. There was a deluge of rain, of course, and here comes Sonny to jumpstart. Too much information, but how do you describe retailers that represent you with quality, sincerity and commitment, and then extend friendship?

I believe in the art and artists they represent. They always KNOW the artist, their education and commitment to their art, the mindset of the artist interests them and adds to the authenticity of the work itself." — artist Sharon DeAlexandris

"I always feel welcome at The Charles Street Gallery. It seems like a second home."
— poet Warren Slesinger

"Sonny and Georgia have redefined what it means to be a family business. They make all their visitors feel like family and have adopted many of us. Stop in to meet local artists, see amazing artwork, make new friends, listen to good music, and eat Georgia and Tanja's amazing home cooking. They are part of what makes Beaufort a nice place to live." — scientist Samantha Campbell

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"I bake poundcakes for Georgia whenever she commands, especially since Sonny grows some good peppers for my hot sauce. Their sense of humor is the main ingredient." —Irby Rentz, their unadopted child and mover of heavy objects.

"The two of them, Georgia and Lyles (whom I seem more often to call "Sonny," because Georgia does, and we know Georgia rules), of course, make the place. It's the place, at their glorious receptions, where we've met almost every kindred spirit we've ever met in Beaufort. I remember our first visit in, I think, 2001, when we met Cabell Heyward, saw his very fine work, and hit it off (anybody use that expression anymore?).

Martine and I were there whenever we could be there; our two daughters easily meshed with the garden and played with Kobe and Cade. The four of them growing up together has been another joy of living here. In fact, the Charles Street Gallery and Georgia and Sonny have been the key human factor, outside of our immediate family, in almost all of that joy: meeting people; loving Georgia's food; swaying to Phil's music; warming next to Sonny's multiple fires. Mr. Phillips (Lyles/Sonny), by the way, is one of the most enthusiastically literary people I've ever known. He's a person any writer would write for. And Georgia is beautifully adept at keeping all of us from too much bullshit. Great hearts, both of them; never to be taken for granted. I will always be grateful also for their welcoming our periodic poetry readings in the garden— more than welcoming, they almost demand that we be there. Let me not forget to mention my love of hearing Sonny's tales of Memphis and my serious attachment to Serbia, despite and because of its turbulent history. These two people carry large gravitas, deeply instructive senses of place, along with great joy in living, which they always share: Georgia and Sonny are wonderfully contagious people. I love them both. Georgia, in my head, just told me to shut up already." — poet Quitman Marshall

"I can't imagine Beaufort without the Charles Street Gallery. The inspiration, the creativity, the friendship, the love. Georgia and Sonny generate this kind of warm, nourishing energy wherever they go. (They can't help it; they're like the sun.) I'm just so glad they came here." – Lowcountry Weekly editor Margaret Evans

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