

# RICHMOND HILL NEIGHBORS

OCTOBER 2021

Coasting  
with the  
Clarks

# Coasting with the Clarks

BY SALLY WHITEHEAD | PHOTOS BY MEGAN MYRICK PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE CLARK FAMILY



**R**uss and Karen Clark made the decision to purchase a second home in Richmond Hill 18 years ago while they were still living, working and raising a family in the Atlanta area. Karen is from Tennessee, and Russ grew up in Florida. “At the time, Atlanta was a great place for us to live that was in the middle—*but*, it was too far from the coast,” Russ explained. Fortunately, while looking for a solution to that problem, good friends with a home at Kilkenny Creek invited the Clarks for a visit over spring break. “We fell in love with the area and decided to see if we could make it work. The crazy thing was—we ended up buying the house right next door to our friends!” Now the Clarks are officially “empty nesters,” and are closer than ever to making the place they love so much their forever home!

Russ and Karen met while doing undergraduate work at Vanderbilt University, and were married shortly thereafter. They lived in Raleigh, NC while Karen finished her accounting degree, then moved to Atlanta, where Russ obtained his master’s degree and Ph.D. at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Russ has been employed by Georgia Tech for 21 years; Karen has been a tax accountant for 25 years, and is sole proprietor of her own company, Karen A. Clark CPA.

Russ shares joint appointments with Georgia Tech Atlanta, where he is the senior research scientist in the School of Computer Science and Georgia Tech Savannah, where he is the Director of Mobile Technology and Internet of Things. He has an office and lab space at the Savannah campus where he teaches sensor work and mobile app classes and led a fun, Internet Things and Sensors summer camp for middle school students. When Georgia Tech Savannah transitioned its focus to professional development, continuing education classes and K-12 programs, the campus also became an excellent place to anchor local research activities on the coast and, in 2018, it became home-base for an exciting, collaborative project called Smart Sea Level Sensors.

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“The nice thing about this entire project is that it originated 3 years ago right here in Richmond Hill, at Kilkenny Creek. It was inspired by our experiences with hurricanes Matthew and Irma, when the tide gauge at Fort Pulaski didn’t provide the information that was needed to know what was happening in the neighborhoods and streets of Chatham and Bryan counties,” explained Russ. “Being an engineer from Georgia Tech and a computer scientist who works with wireless, mobile and sensors, I knew it could be done, and for a much cheaper cost than had been possible before. I like to refer to what we’re doing as ‘bringing the research from Atlanta to Savannah, and bringing the community, problems and interesting partnerships from Savannah to Atlanta.’ A big part of our role as research anchor in Savannah is keeping the coastal connection alive and thriving because it’s tremendously important--and is also a wonderful thing to experience.”

The Smart Sea Level Sensors project involves a partnership between Georgia Tech Savannah researchers, Chatham County and the City of Savannah to develop and deploy small sensors along the coast to monitor water levels and relay data back that provides real-time measurements of rising sea levels.

Because Georgia Tech Savannah actually connects all coastal communities, Russ likes to think of it as Georgia Tech Coastal, and hopes more folks from Richmond Hill will take advantage of the outstanding continuing education classes and summer camps offered there. “Also, as the Smart Sea Level Sensors

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expands in Bryan County, we'll need more volunteers to host equipment from private and community docks. For more information on the Smart Sea Level Sensors project, please see his article on page 8.

**K**aren and Russ have three children--27-year-old Anna, a producer at the NBC's affiliate in Charlotte, NC, 25-year-old Sydney, a Neurosomatic Therapist in Clearwater, FL and 21-year-old David, a 3rd year student at Georgia Tech, majoring in Earth and Atmospheric Science. "Their mother's a CPA, their father's a Computer Scientist, but neither of the first two chose careers anything like ours," laughed Russ.

The Clarks enjoy sailing, kayaking and spending time together at the beach. Every year, the family gathers together for a 5-10-mile overnight hiking trip to Mt. Le Conte in the Smokie Mountains of Eastern Tennessee. "Hiking's a great way for us to spend time together, and it's nice that everyone enjoys it enough to block it out on their calendars," Russ said. "Even with a child who has to come all the way from Florida, they're all still into it, so that's awesome!"

Russ and Karen's house is one of two original Ford Plantation houses that were moved to Kilkenny in the 1970s. Determined to keep the distinct architecture and historical connection, they decided to renovate the solid pine structure, instead of tearing it down and building something new. "After hurricane Irma, rising waters got underneath the house and caused some damage, so we re-did the downstairs, and are re-doing the upstairs now to make it our full-time residence. Karen's mother, June, lives with us and, when the renovations are complete, we'll have room for all of us and for when the kids to come visit!"

A dock on Kilkenny Creek is a beautiful place to watch the sunrise over Ossabaw Island, then watch the dolphins play and white egrets come home to nest as the moon rises in the evening. After a storm, there's almost always a rainbow. The small community on the creek enjoys getting together, and helping each other out whenever there's a need. "Especially last year--while trying to socially distance--around 6 o'clock, someone would inevitably send a group text declaring 'Dock Time,'" recalled Russ. "We'd head out to the designated dock to unwind, tell stories and catch up in a safe and really lovely way. Our neighbors are absolutely my favorite part of living in Richmond Hill."

