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THE HURONS: Helping Others With Strings Attached

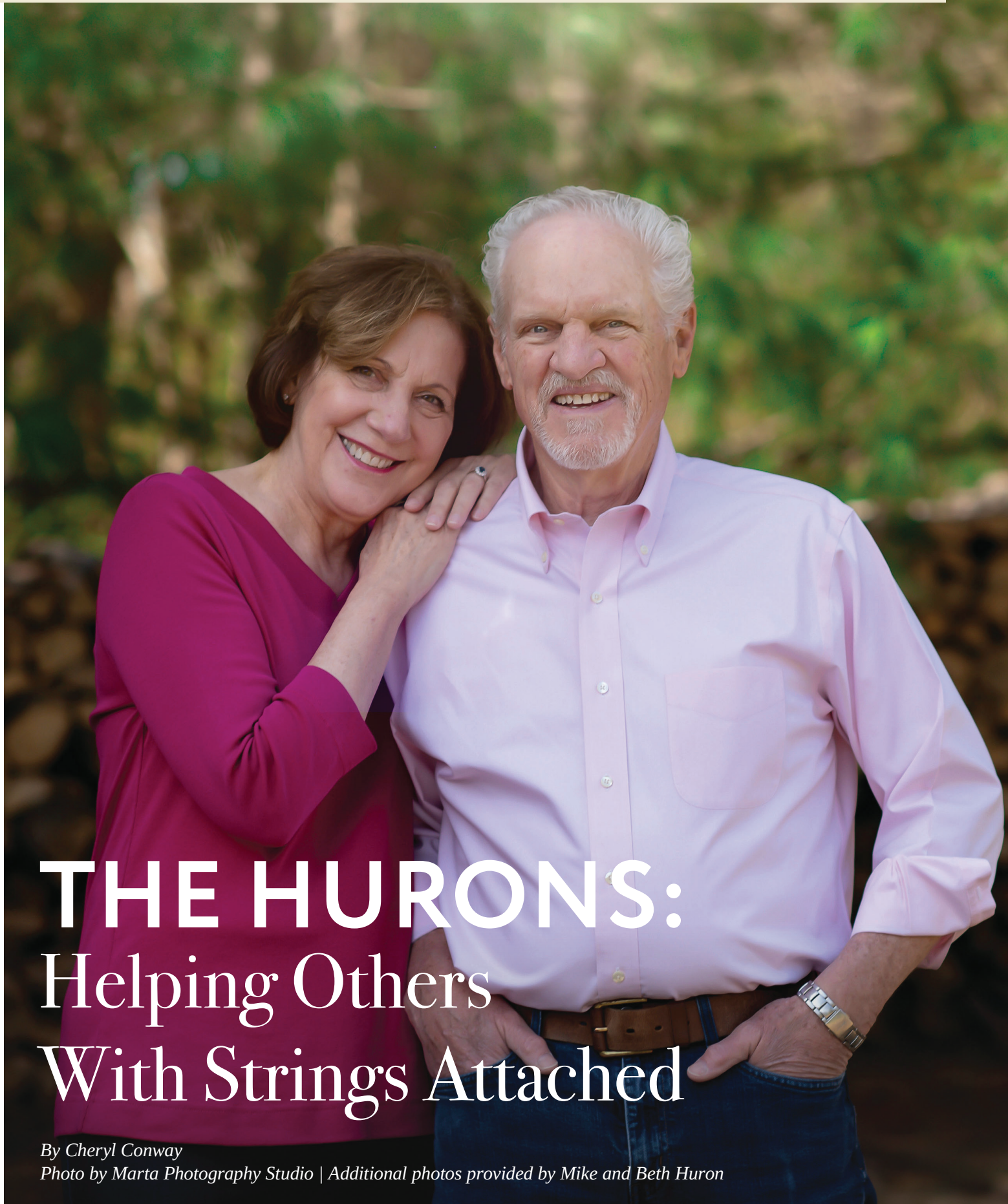
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Cover Photo by Marta Photography Studio

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THE HURONS: Helping Others With Strings Attached

By Cheryl Conway

Photo by Marta Photography Studio | Additional photos provided by Mike and Beth Huron

Through their heart and hands—from the work they did as professionals to their time spent in retirement—the Hurons do what they can to make life better for others.

Beth Huron’s heart comes into play after working four decades as a nurse and the last three years as an advocate for foster children; Mike Huron’s hands were strong as an aerospace engineer for 46 years and now touches the lives of those who are gifted by his refurbished guitars.

From the time they met as teenagers, the Hurons dated on and off until realizing they were meant to be, so they followed their heart strings and tied their knot.

“We met at a gathering of friends on the local beach in 1966,” explains Beth. It was on the North Shore at Staley’s Beach in Bayville, Long Island.

“Mike was easy going and had a great laugh,” says Beth, who was only 14 years old at the time.

Thinking back to when he was 16 and first laid eyes on her, Mike recalls, “Certainly she was pretty.”

They both grew up in Long Island about four miles apart.

“I grew up in a small village, Bayville, which is located on the north shore of Long Island,” explains Beth. “My father built the Cape Cod style home that my parents raised my sister, Mary, and myself in. My childhood was comprised of endless summer days on the beach that included community clambakes, bonfires and parades

down Main Street. Our town was close knit, and it was just natural for individuals to extend a helping hand to a neighbor who needed it. I guess I can best explain my fond memories of my hometown in this way —If I were to write a children’s book, Bayville would make the ideal setting.”

Mike, meanwhile, was born and raised in the small town of Locust Valley on the North Shore of Long Island. He was the youngest of three brothers.

“My childhood memories of growing up in Locust Valley include playing in the woods and fields of abandoned farmland with childhood friends, fishing in nearby ponds and beaches and having neighborhood baseball games,” he recalls.

The two dated casually between their high school and college years.

“We had been on and off together for a lot of years, our entire teenage years just about,” says Beth. “As we transitioned from high school to college, we took breaks from each other. We always got back together

again, which is good because I think my parents loved Michael more than me,” Beth laughs.

After five years, while still in college, they got engaged in November 1971.

“We always talked about it,” says Beth about getting engaged. “He surprised me with a ring. We didn’t pick it out together.”



Mike and Beth marry on May 31, 1975.

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Mike and Beth in Glacier National Park July 18, 2016.

Mike chuckles, “I knew what you wanted.”

They got married on May 31, 1975, at a small Catholic church in Bayville. “Michael’s uncle married us,” adds Beth. After the ceremony, there was a garden reception at Beth’s parents’ home.

Beth received her bachelors’ degree in nursing the year before from Keuka College in New York.

“I was first introduced to nursing as a teen when I volunteered as a candy striper in our local hospital,” she says.

Mike, meanwhile, received a degree in mechanical engineering from NYIT in 1975 while working in the research lab of Sperry.

“I had an interest in mechanical things,” says Mike. “Putting things together and then taking things apart. It started off with bicycles really, then pulling cars apart.”

He never worked as mechanical engineer though and instead

began working in a research and development laboratory in inertial navigation.

“I continued to work in the aerospace arena for many years, and later, transitioned to a focus on lean manufacturing within the Honeywell Corp., which led to frequent national and international travel,” adds Mike.

His work led the Hurons to relocate to Sparta in 1986 when he took a position with Allied Signal in Teterboro.

They were a family of four by then. They had their daughter Megan in 1977 and their son Adam in 1982. Their kids grew up attending Sparta schools from elementary through high school, and the Hurons settled in nicely, living in town these past 37 years.

“Sparta reminded both Beth and I of the towns we had lived in on Long Island,” says Mike. “We especially appreciated the highly regarded schools, the town library and the focus on family life.”

Adds Beth, “We were very happy with Sparta schools. “Our daughter had an interest in music.” She also enjoyed science and got involved in its honors program.

Their son, meanwhile, was interested in sports, particularly baseball and the ski team.

“Like most parents in Sparta, I enjoyed assisting with the kid’s town sports programs,” says Mike, who coached his son in baseball early on. “I have great memories of enjoying time spent on the field with little league baseball players who all had their own childhood dreams of one day making it to the majors. I love when I see one of the young guys today in town that I coached way back when.”

Beth also volunteered to help with the music and sports programs. She also kept working as a nurse.

“When I first relocated to Sparta in 1986, I began to work as a pediatric nurse caring for high-risk infants in the home setting,” she



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explains. “My previous professional experience working in neonatal intensive care units and pediatric cardiac care in New York, made my career transition seem natural. Later, I worked as a visiting nurse in Sussex County and eventually became the administrator for a Medicare certified agency that serviced Sussex County and Pike County, Pa.

“I truly loved my nursing career and am grateful for all the opportunities it provided for me,” she says about her 40-year career before retiring in 2014.

Her interests in community kept her involved with Connect For Community, which she helped with backpacks and other fundraising activities in 2015. But after COVID, her involvement with the organization dwindled. She hopes to return to volunteering with the group in the future, she says.

“It’s a great group of people working behind the scenes to make things happen,” says Beth.

As a couple, the Hurons are enjoying their favorite past-times.

“We try to stay pretty active,” says Beth. “We both enjoy gardening; we both enjoy reading; Mike likes his music. He’s down in the workshop working on a guitar or a piece of furniture, or a project with his grandchildren,” she laughs.

“We like to hike; we kayak; we bike ride,” she adds. They have been discovering the Rail Trail in Morris and Sussex counties. “Sometimes we take our grandchildren with us but then we have to keep up with them,” Beth laughs.

“That’s true,” Mike adds.

They are looking forward to celebrating their 48th wedding anniversary with a multi-generational trip with their kids and grandkids to Yellowstone National Park in July.

Their daughter Megan and son-in-law Mark live in Warwick with



their 10-year old daughter Elizabeth. And their son Adam lives in Connecticut with his wife Jennifer, and their two boys Edward, 10, and William, 6.

“Our grandchildren will be old enough,” says Beth. “We want them to enjoy the natural beauty of the parks and become good stewards of the land.”

While spending time with their family takes precedent, the Hurons save some room in their heart and hands for other children.

“Family is there for you every step of the journey,” is their belief. “But some children are not as fortunate to have a childhood that is not marked by trauma and pain.”

Beth knew in her heart that she wanted to help make a difference, so she became a Court Appointed Special Advocate working with foster

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Beth pictured with the Honorable Michael Paul Wright, J.S.C. at the ceremony for CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) in Morristown Court on June 19, 2019.



Mike having an impromptu guitar session with his grandson, William, age 5. The guitar is one that Mike refurbished for him.

“When a child’s life is filled with uncertainty and sadness, you feel the need to make a difference even if it is one child at a time,” says Beth. Every child should be entitled to a childhood that is carefree and loving. I believe all children have the right to have a happy childhood. As adults we have a responsibility to make sure that does happen.”

Beth has been trained to support younger children aged newborn to adolescence.

The role of a CASA volunteer is to advocate for the child and provide continuity in their lives. The CASA advocate ensures that the appropriate services are in place to meet the physical and emotional needs of the child.

“Volunteers collaborate with stakeholders, educators, teachers, guidance counselors, therapists, daycare workers, pediatricians, counselors, whoever is involved in a child’s case,” she explains.

It didn’t take long before Mike decided to utilize his passion and get involved too.

When Beth’s CASA supervisor visited them, she could not help noticing multiple guitars in their home, so she inquired.

For the past year, Mike has been refurbishing acoustic guitars and gifting them to older children in CASA who either have an interest in music or have played guitar before.

children in Sussex and Morris counties. Beth completed her training with CASA and in 2019 was appointed by the court.

“I always thought after I’d retire that’s what I wanted to do,” says Beth. “I enjoy working with children and I enjoy working with families. It’s a good fit.”

Her goal is to provide hope to children who often feel hopeless. “To simply let them know that they are loved for who they are,” says Beth. “Although they’re faced with many challenges in their young lives, they do have a future and they should dream big. There will always be someone behind them to encourage and support them.”

As a CASA volunteer advocate, Beth is currently working on her third case and has so far helped four children through CASA.

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“Many of these children are from immigrant families,” explains Beth. “It helps them to bring with them their cultural experiences, especially if it is music. Music may have been a part of their family life.”

Mike donates his refurbished guitars to other children and adults, as well, outside of CASA.

“My focus is wherever there is a need,” says Mike.

Music helps people deal with situations that can involve trauma, such as Veterans and children in the foster care system, he says.

“Overall, it’s a good thing to do,” says Mike. “I hope it provides a calming effect to that trauma.”

Mike played guitar at a young age as a calming effect when his father died, which provided a means to deal with the loss and his emotions.

“I’ve played for years,” says Mike. He estimates 60 years of playing and his skill is mostly self-taught. “I’ve always loved music; something I picked up when I was very young. It helped me through sometimes thinking about where I was as a youth. It was self-satisfying.”

Explains Beth, “There are times you can’t express with words what you’re feeling, but when you put it to music, it really does help.”

The first guitar he bought he gave away to a woman in Beth’s college dorm.

“The RA was teaching this girl in the college who had a physical disability,” explains Mike. “We rigged something together. We strung the guitar for her so she could play. When she wanted to give it back to me, I said, ‘no, you keep it.’ It was very satisfying.

“Years later, I said this is what I want to do,” explains Mike. “I want to get guitars in the hands of kids who can’t afford one so they can have that joy of music.” So for the past five years, since he retired as an aerospace engineer, he has been refurbishing guitars. He looks online to purchase or sometimes people donate them to him.

Mike fixes parts that wear out, bridges that get torn off and strings that need to be replaced. He estimates refurbishing about a dozen in the more recent years.

Parts may wear out but not Mike’s joy of playing.

He still plays, as she points to the one on the wall.

Recalls Beth, “He’s always played the guitar since I’ve known him. In the 60’s and 70’s he always carried his guitar around. He used to visit me in college. We would sit by the fireplace and he’d play guitar. The patrons would say ‘let’s buy the kids a drink,’ and they did! It had its benefits,” she laughs.



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