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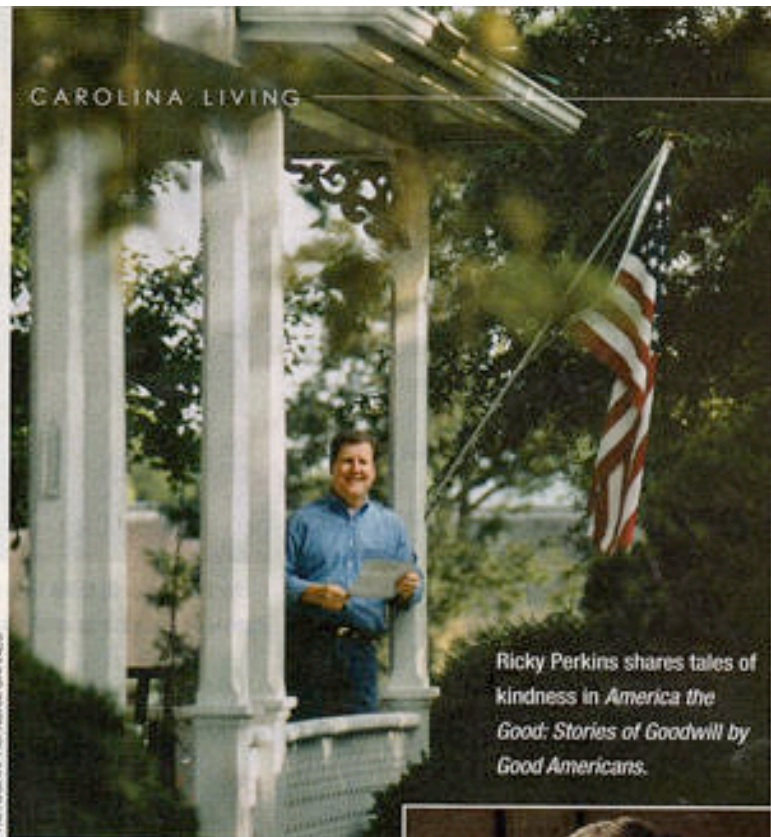


South Mills, NC—Something new's been added: the 4.5 mile Dismal Swamp Canal Trail. Visitors can now go birding, hiking, biking, or paddle the oldest hand-dug waterway in the country, part of the Intracoastal Waterway. A camera is a must! Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center. 1-877-771-8333 or DismalSwamp.com



CAROLINA LIVING

PHOTOGRAPHS: ADAM BARNES



Ricky Perkins shares tales of kindness in *America the Good: Stories of Goodwill by Good Americans*.

Goodwill Hunting

A North Carolina man shines a spotlight on some of America's selfless people.



Ricky Perkins jumped in his car and started driving with no destination in mind. As he passed through a rural area, he thought again about the book he wanted to create. The idea for it first came after he heard about a teenager who gave up a chance to buy his dream car to help a family in need.

Moved by the boy's selfless act, Ricky believed a collection of such stories might remind people of the goodness that exists in America. Pulling over for a cool drink at a country store, Ricky thought, "Today is the day. I'm going to get serious about this project." He

aimed his impromptu first pitch at a stranger working the cash register.

"I'm writing this book, and I'm looking for stories of goodwill," he told the woman. "Is there anybody in your area who might have done a good thing for somebody else?"

Her reaction? "The lady looked up at me with a kind of pregnant pause and said, 'No, I don't know anybody like that,'" he says.

But Wait a Minute...

At home in Advance, Ricky laughs as he recalls that moment. "I thought to myself, 'Boy, this is going to be a long journey.'" But then the cashier had second

thoughts. With a nod to a grandfatherly man working the fruit-and-vegetable stand outside, she said, "Now he might know someone."

"I had to muster my enthusiasm to approach him," Ricky admits. A few minutes later, the would-be author was grateful he hadn't let his goodwill hunting die a quiet death.

"He told me about the bikes," Ricky explains with a grin. The gentleman described the good work of J. L. "Mule" Powers, a retired truck driver



Ricky Perkins (left) talks with patrons and staff at Battle Branch Café in Yadkinville. Casual conversations often lead to stories for the *America the Good* series.

in Winston-Salem. Mule restores bicycles for needy kids by using donated and salvaged parts or buying what he needs out of his own pocket. The youngsters pay nothing.

The American Way

Mule's story became one of 25 true tales featured in *America the Good: Stories of Goodwill by Good Americans*. With help from author Carol Thompson and contributing author Lynn Byrd, Ricky produced the book through Wren's Nest Publishing, a small publishing house he started.

"It's not about us," Ricky says of the editorial team. "It's the people in the book who make it." Ricky and Lynn are hard at work on a second book, planned for 2007. (Carol bowed out due to other obligations.) "We have some other special editions we want to do as well," Ricky says, including versions that focus on the good deeds of athletes, celebrities, and corporations.

"It was faith in the good of Americans that inspired me to do this first book," says Ricky, who owns an advertising firm. "I have a lot of awards from my business, but this book is what feels most important to me."

The featured people live across the country and differ in age, occupation, race, religion, economic

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status, and so on. Their inspirational stories range from small to large gestures of kindness and from the dramatic to the simple.

Ron Mercier gave a kidney to a high school student he once taught. Lynn Rich helped a young disabled woman, a triple amputee, achieve her dream of riding horses. Janet Hargrove, mother of five, checked on her elderly neighbor twice a day and brought him meals. Griffin "Deacon" Panion raised money for his church, by overseeing the church's



Winston-Salem writer Lynn Byrd served as contributing author of *America the Good*.



J.L. "Mule" Powers, a retired truck driver in Winston-Salem, refurbishes bikes for kids who can't afford them.

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Contributing author Lynn Byrd takes a floor seat, while Ricky Perkins and his wife, Mimi Hodges-Perkins, sort through photos of people featured in the book.

parking lot operation during Atlanta Braves's home games for 13 years (and counting).

"It reminds us of what really matters while we are here on this earth," Ricky says. "There are people all over the place who are performing these acts of kindness all the time. That to me is the essence of what's great about

our country. I believe in the goodness of Americans. I believe they are good at heart."

He worries not a whit about whether such sentiments make him sound naive. After all, he has honest-to-goodness, real-life stories to back up his beliefs.

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

Do Your Own Good Deed—Buy the Book

America the Good sells for \$19. Part of the proceeds benefit three charities, buyer's choice: Habitat for Humanity; North American Riding for the Handicapped Association; and Locks of Love, an organization that asks people to grow and donate their hair to make wigs for patients who've lost their own due to various kinds of treatment. The book is primarily marketed as a fundraiser. "We're hopeful that school groups, churches, and charitable organizations will use the book to raise money for good causes," says Ricky. "It seems appropriate that our book be used for giving back." To purchase a book or for more information, visit www.americathegood.com.

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