

From Saudi Arabian oil refinery to a Burlington bike shop

Jones-LeGros lives out her life-long dream as a small business owner

Dan Rickershauser
Reporter

On Nov. 9, Tara Jones-LeGros got on a plane to Saudi Arabia to meet with her husband. The occasional visits and daily video chats before she goes to work are the only contact she has with him.

Two years ago, Tara Jones-LeGros was living with him in Saudi Arabia while he worked as a safety engineer for Saudi Aramco, a Saudi-owned oil company. Today, she runs their bicycle shop, the J&L Bicycle Company, in downtown Burlington. Her husband still lives and works in Saudi Arabia.

While she didn't intend for her life to end up like this, the business opportunity didn't give her the time to wait.

"I landed here in Burlington, didn't know a soul and started my business," Jones-LeGros said. "It's crazy but this is how it worked out."

For Jones-LeGros, owning a bicycle shop fulfills a passion for cycling she has had since an early age.

"I got my first job when I was 15 to be able to buy my first real road bike. From that point on I was always really into it," Jones-LeGros said.

Her passion for cycling was quickly interrupted.

"Two weeks after I bought the bike that I worked so hard for, I was riding it home and this guy had just robbed a house and was running away" Jones-LeGros said. "He saw me, tackled me and took off with my bike."

Even though she got her bike back, it still took away from the cycling experience.

"Riding a bike is such a sense of

freedom. When something like that happens, it takes that away," Jones-LeGros said. "I was really pretty traumatized by the event and, until I was in college, I never rode by myself."

The Tennessee native started college at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. She later transferred to Louisiana State University and got a degree in environmental science, a career path that led her to her husband, Marc Jones-LeGros.

While living in Baton Rouge, La., the couple considered opening a hobby shop and even went as far as to line up suppliers and buy a storage unit for the shop. But when a headhunter contacted her about a job position in Saudi Arabia, they put their plans to own a business on hold.

In August of 2004, Jones-LeGros and her husband relocated to Ras Tanura, a small beach community on the Persian Gulf.

"When we moved to Saudi Arabia, I wasn't allowed to work there in my real profession," Jones-LeGros said. "They didn't let women in the refinery, and to do my job I needed to be in the refinery."

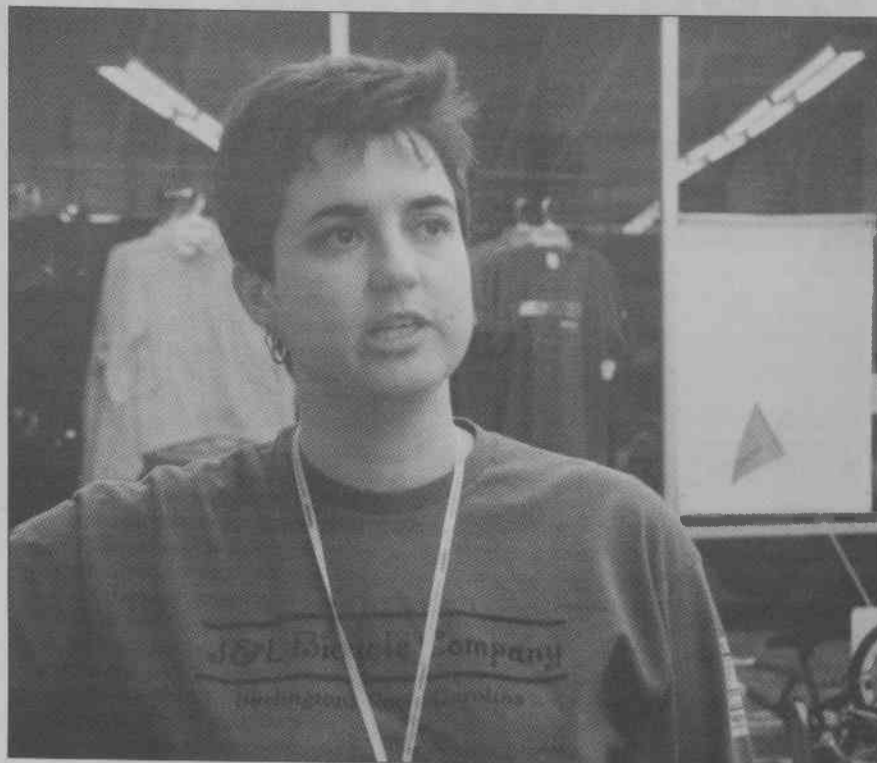
Having free time, Jones-LeGros bought a bicycle in Bahrain and got back into cycling.

"I started training and lost a bunch of weight and just totally fell back in love with riding again," Jones-LeGros said.

Living in Saudi Arabia as an American, Jones-LeGros found a different reality than the news-media portrays.

"People here, based on FOX News or CNN or whoever, have the impression that Middle Eastern Muslims hate Americans," Jones-LeGros said. "This is not true. I can sit around with some Saudi friends and they will tell you they hate the terrorism that has mangled their religion."

Still having the dream to own their own business, Jones-LeGros and her husband started looking at business



DAN RICKERSHAUSER | Photographer

Tara Jones-LeGros opened J&L Bicycles Company in Burlington in 2007. She must balance running the shop with visiting her husband, who is currently working in Saudi Arabia.

listings online.

During an online search, Jones-LeGros discovered that the Elon Bike Shop was for sale.

"So we decided, 'Yeah, that looks pretty good,'" Jones-LeGros said. "North Carolina is just prime bicycling country, so we flew over [to Burlington] from Saudi Arabia for three days to meet with the owner of the Elon Bike Shop."

Although the deal fell through, Jones-LeGros decided to stay in the area, eventually finding the store where they are located today, in downtown Burlington.

"So here was Burlington and Alamance County, with no bike shop. The opportunity kind of slapped me in the face, and even though my husband was not finished working in Saudi, we couldn't pass up the business opportunity," Jones-LeGros said.

In May of 2007, Jones-LeGros moved to Burlington to start up her bicycle company. Moving to Burlington, where she had no connections or a place to live, was daunting, but she soon fell in

love with Alamance County.

J&L Bicycle Company opened for business in 2007. According to Jones-LeGros, one of the things she loves most about the location is the walk-in traffic.

"Where we are, we get walk-in traffic all the time. Being near the public library is fantastic," Jones-LeGros said.

Elon senior Whitney Waters has been working at J&L Bicycle Company since the beginning of the school year. While working there, Waters has come to consider Jones-LeGros a friend as well as a boss.

"I've gone out to dinner with her and stuff and just talked to her," Waters said. "She's really easy to talk to, really friendly, really funny."

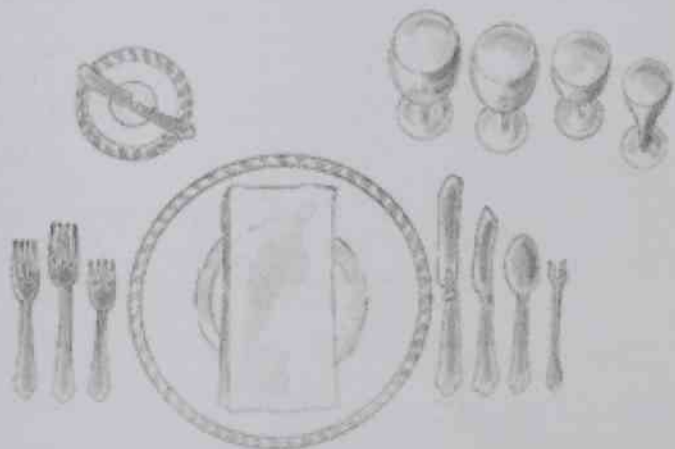
"I really respect her for being able to run that business when her husband is far away," said Waters. "She's having to go back and forth and live in two places."

Until her husband is able to retire in the next few years, Jones-LeGros will continue living her life in two places, running her business while she's at it.

How to: Set a table

Learn how to properly set a table and impress family members at upcoming holiday dinners.

- 1) Place a large service plate directly on the table between the arms of the chair. Place a folded cloth napkin on top.
- 2) The forks go to the left of the plate in order of use. In most situations, the small salad fork would go on the outside and the larger dinner fork would be closest to the plate. If a fish course will be served, a smaller fish fork would be placed between the two forks.
- 3) The other utensils go to the right of the plate. The dinner knife will be to the immediate right of the plate, with the blade facing inwards. If needed, a fish knife would be placed to the right of the dinner knife and a soup spoon would be to the right of the knives.
- 4) The water glass should be placed directly above the dinner knife. Any other glasses (wine, champagne, juice) should be placed to the right of the water glass in order of size, with the largest on the left and the smaller ones to the right.
- 5) A bread plate can be placed above the dinner fork, in line with the glasses. A small butter knife should be placed across the plate.
- 6) Dessert utensils can be brought out when dessert is served, or placed horizontally above the service plate.



OVERHEARD AT ELON U

"Ever walked in on a conversation and wish you hadn't? Overhear a comment that made you wonder just how rigorous Elon's admission process is? Here's the place to share."

Junior Nick Massa created "Overheard at Elon U," a Facebook group that highlights ridiculous comments made by Elon students.

The group features daily posts and hosts more than 850 members.

Boy with heavy backpack: "I just wish I had boobs so they could help me stand upright."

—overheard by Shelley Russell

An alum at Sandy's: "Hey Jose! Would you feed chicken wings to transsexuals? Jenny Craig would not feed chicken wings to transsexuals."

—overheard by Julie Halm

"I didn't even know there was a Delaware!"

—overheard by Daniel Harwell

"You guys are nice ... I'm sorry I pooped on you."

—overheard by Carolyn Baumgarten