

Shored by family, friends, Alexy pursues dream of owning restaurant

By Ron Page

Tragic events often alter the course of one's life.

For Cary's Joanna Alexy, the death of her husband in an auto accident last spring could easily have crushed the dream they both shared of her operating her own restaurant.

Thomas was always so supportive of me," she said while seated at a booth in a rear area of her China Gate Restaurant at Preston Corners Shopping Center. "He knew it had always been a dream of mine and he was there for me always."

Thomas Alexy was not in the restaurant business. Originally from Columbus, Ohio, he was a software engineer for a computer company, and it was while he was on a 10-week business trip to Taiwan in 1981 that he and Joanna met.

He returned to the United States three years later she joined him. They were married in Ohio and had two children, Eric, now 3 1/2 and Tiffany, 6.

For Joanna, moving to a new country with a culture so different than her own, was an experience she says she'll never forget. She was born in Kaoshung, Taiwan, after her mother and father, who was in the Taiwanese Navy during World War II, left China to take up residence there.

One of four children, she has an older sister, Sandy, living in Australia, a sister, Louise, in England, an older brother, Yuang, still in



FAMILY TIES—Joanna Alexy likes having her children, Eric and Tiffany, around. Running a restaurant leaves her little spare time.

Taiwan, and another brother Tony, who came to the States a few years ago. A chef for 15 years, Tony heads the kitchen staff at China Gate.

"Everything was so foreign to me, even speaking on the telephone frightened me," she said. "I was afraid to pick it up when it rang."

she explained. "I had a fear because Americans spoke so fast and I was embarrassed that I would not be able to respond properly."

"I also wasn't used to such open spaces. Houses and buildings are very close, tight together in Taiwan and that had been all I had ever

known. Now, suddenly everything here was spread out, houses were separated and everything appeared so open."

And then there was the food. "It was so different," she said.

Joanna worked as a waitress, but she recalls seeing so many places offering things like pizza, fried chicken and French fries.

"I was used to vegetables at every meal," she said. "How did I feel? I do believe the majority of food is better for you in China. Vegetables are stir fried, and not overcooked. They are more nutritious, in general."

When her husband took a job transfer, it brought them to Cary, and realizing her feelings about opening a restaurant, she said, he gave her his total support.

China Gate opened about two years ago, the first restaurant in the Preston Corners Shopping Center. "My brother, Tony, who has been cooking professionally for 15 years is in charge of the kitchen. He came here from England several years ago where he was a chef. His specialties are French and Chinese cooking," she said.

Her father died three years ago, and her mother lives with her in Cary. "She goes back to China every year to see my grandmother, an aunt I have there, and several cousins," she said. "No, I haven't been there. Hopefully, someday."

She said her mother- and father-in-law visit her often from Ohio.

"I can't thank all those who have helped me since the accident, so many wonderful neighbors, coworkers and friends. My neighbors, for example, cut the grass 19 times after the accident, each one taking turns. They did things like changing filters and washing my car, household tasks, even cooked dinner for my kids the first three or four months. How could I ever express my feelings to all who sent cards and flowers and to all those phone calls?" she said, wiping a tear from her eye.

She said she had to prove to herself that she could survive and that's why she works seven days a week.

"I could never let him down. My husband was so supportive to me in every way, so understanding about my dreams of having my own restaurant," she said.

"Then the accident happened that morning in April while he was on his way to work at RTP along Davis Drive. The call from the hospital came as such a shock. My son was too young to understand. My daughter wouldn't talk about it for weeks. Finally she said it was because she didn't want to make me cry."

"I never had a chance to tell him how good he had been, I never had a chance even to say good-bye," she said.

Employers invited to job fair

Morrisville area businesses who are struggling to find workers might find some relief at a job fair sponsored by the Triangle Transit Authority on Feb. 7.

About 30 to 40 prospective workers from Johnston County will be transported to the Raleigh-Airport Courtyard by Marriott Hotel from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. to interview for jobs.

Billie Cox, who runs the vanpool program for TTA said the idea is to "bring workers from the same general area to jobs in the same general area," and transportation can be provided for jobs.

Most of the workers have been referred from the "Work First" program, the Employment Security Commission, and vocational training and community college programs in Johnston County.

Businesses who might be interested in hiring these workers are asked to contact Ms. Cox at 990-9038, ext. 20, for a table at the Job Fair.

Thank You For Reading The Morrisville and Preston Progress!

Taking a lesson on how to live from two who did it well

By Roxanne Powers

Members of the small community of Carpenter have lost two young men under the age of 34 in less than three weeks.

These young men didn't share lifestyles or death-styles. What they did share was an ability to extract the most from what life offered.

Mike Hatcher was born on Nov. 15, 1963 and died at the age of 33 on Dec. 31, 1996. As a child Mike was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis, and courageously spent his entire life fighting the disease that often claims its victims in childhood.

Mike loved salt water fishing with his Dad, Dr. Hubert Hatcher, reading and writing.

Many are the people who were influenced to make positive lifestyle changes because of Mike's diligent fight to live. I know that for a fact. I became one of those

people when I gave up smoking almost two years ago on Feb. 19, 1995.

Mike's next door neighbor and cousin by marriage, Kelly Hockaday, lost her 30-year-old brother Shawn Hansen to a fatal ice-climbing accident on Jan. 19, 1997.

As a child, Shawn suffered from asthma, which seriously hindered his ability to enjoy life. Though he never out-grew the asthma, he made good on his childhood vow to live life to the fullest in spite of it.

In his zeal, he did take risks, and one of those risks did cost him his life, but then, how many more of us waste our lives by taking no risks at all?

Both young men's values were reflected by the cross section of people - seemingly all ages, races and incomes - showing their respect at the funerals.

Both young men seemed to know how to pack more into 30 years of

living than most people do in a lifetime.



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Site near town hall eyed for subdivision

A public hearing will be held on Feb. 24 to discuss the rezoning of about 28 acres off Morrisville-Carpenter Road between the Town Hall and Davis Drive to develop a single-family residential neighborhood.

Charles M. Elam and Associates submitted the petition for rezoning.

The 27.98 acres are currently zoned agricultural district, and would be rezoned to residential-

management conditional use district.

Elam said he has submitted a layout to the town for the subdivision, which would have standard 10,000-foot lots.

After the public hearing, the plans would go to the planning board, and back to the board of commissioners. If plans are approved, construction could begin this summer, Elam said.

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