



# Chowan LIFE

## Red Drum Pottery provides haven and inspiration for the work of local potters

BY EARLINE WHITE  
Correspondent

It was humid the day I went in search of Red Drum Pottery. Afraid because of my lousy sense of direction, I was pleased to find signs leading the way. In the Old Cotton Mill in Edenton, Wes Lassiter and Rhonda Bates have set up shop. Established in this location for two years now, word of mouth has helped Red Drum to become a reputable business.

tual about having a kiln that comes from the earth." Pieces fired in a wood kiln receive an ash texture and vibrant colors that make them one of a kind. It's dramatically different than the electric kilns she and Wes work with now. In the past four years she has been involved in lighting five different wood kilns. (Not only are wood kilns attractions for artists, but have historic basis that may be forgotten because of the lack of them.) Among those kilns that Rhonda helped with was the largest anagama kiln in North

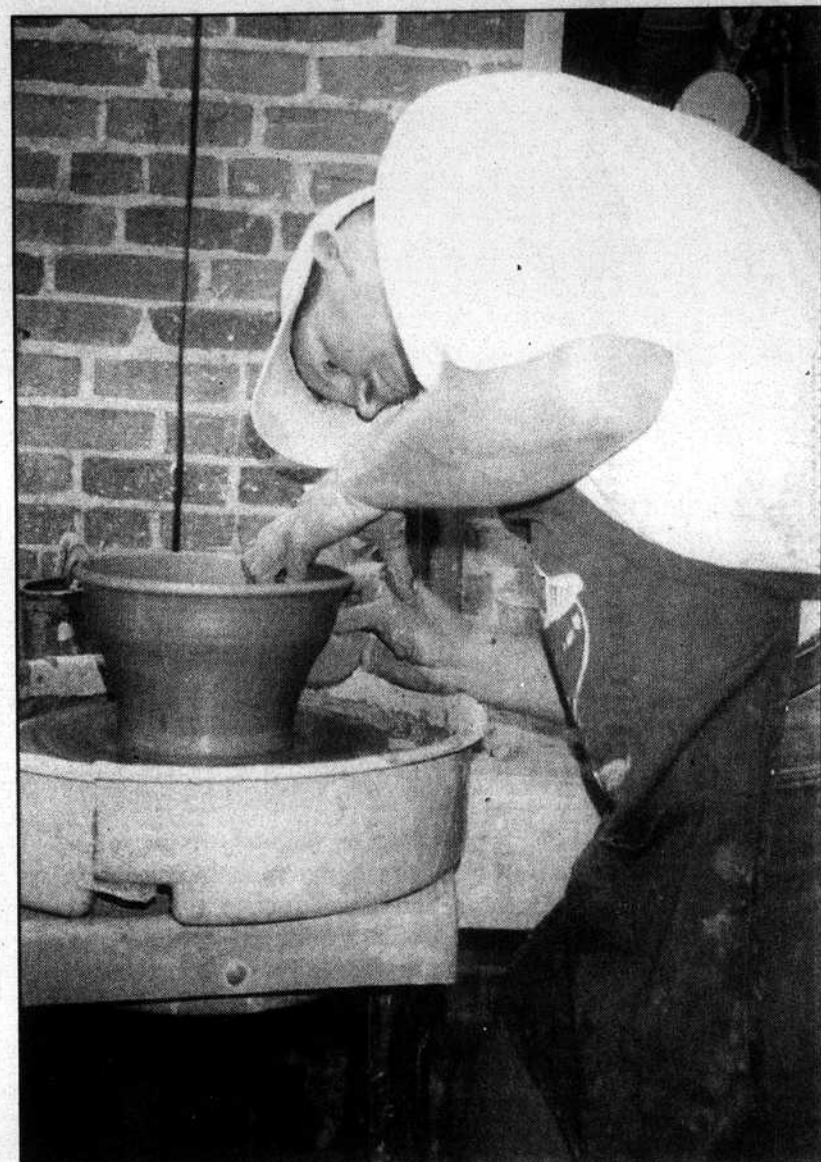
Rhonda continued sculpting, or as some call it, "painting with fire". Her favorite thing to make is teapots, which require creativity. She still paints and her work can be seen alongside her mugs in the pottery. When I walked into her studio that day, she was making a casserole dish. Later the piece will probably be adorned with the fish and earth tone paints that have become the signature of Red Drum creations. For those that prefer custom designs, Red Drum is equipped for

that too. Wes and Rhonda have just begun to customize mugs for individual companies. Other objects for sale include knickknacks and tons of functional items such as colanders, platters, and candles.

Unlike Rhonda, Wes had no background in the arts when he started. A charter captain, a banjo player, and a newspaper advertising and marketer from Charlotte, Wes had no idea that he would be so fulfilled by playing with clay. "The minute I touched the clay, I fell in love with it," he said as he sculpted a bowl. "I learned everything from Rhonda," he said, but it can easily be noticed that he has done quite a bit of growing on his own. "The hardest thing for me was the weight. Making it so that the weight was evenly distributed through the whole piece was challenging. It's a physics thing."

When asked what he most liked to create, Wes said, "I like working with the pitcher form." He held up one of his latest accomplishments that was waiting to dry. The piece sits side by side with one of his first bowls he keeps as a souvenir in the studio. "I like to dare the clay, to take it to extremes, and see how far it will go," he said.

Wes and Rhonda are a team. Originally with a shop in Ocracoke, a lot of their customers were tourists. Since the devastation of Floyd, they closed the shop on the island and moved inland. There still remains an excitement between the two that can be seen in their eyes. "When I am working over here I can't wait to go and see what Wes has



Wes Lassiter sculpts a bowl at the Red Drum Pottery studio he and partner Rhonda Bates operate in Edenton. (Photo by Earline White)



With Rhonda Bates' most bizarre creation, "Sugar Rocky," in the middle, she and Wes Lassiter sit in their bamboo tea hut with homemade teapots for a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. The two share a real excitement about their work and a love of creativity. (Photo by Earline White)

A long way from her D.C. home, Rhonda has thrived on the charm of Edenton. Being able to walk to work and having cultural events nearby has helped to inspire her and Wes. Now Rhonda longs to find some raw farmland or woodland to build a wood kiln and complete a dream. Recently at a workshop with one of the top three tea bowl makers in the world, Peter Callas, Rhonda realized she desperately wanted a wood kiln. She said, "There is something spiri-

Carolina in Bailey. After acquiring her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Corcoran School of Art in D.C., Rhonda worked as a waitress, cleaned houses, and hung wallpaper to support herself. Her passion was painting, but it wasn't profitable. When she started making pottery she knew it would be a long time before her pottery skills equaled those of her painting skills. She said, "The possibilities of pottery are, like painting, endless." So

done. And he rushes over here and pokes around looking at what I just finished," Rhonda said.

Not only are these two a great working pair, but a spiritual one as well. Rhonda confided that she and Wes have a "Hall of Fame" in their house. "Wes made a coffee table from a piece of driftwood. Each time we make something we really love we put it in the middle of the Hall of Fame

table." The two just seem to thrive off of each other and their art shows it. For those lucky enough to get there, Wes and Rhonda will be having a show on the Outer Banks in July. On the 5th and 6th in Chicamacomico at the Rodanthe Lifesaving Station, there will be an arts and crafts show in which Red Drum Pottery will be taking part.

### On your mark... Get set... Clip...

**1200 Local Minutes for \$29.95 per month**

Coupon applies to the leisure plan only, which includes 200 peak and 1000 off-peak minutes per month. Unused minutes expire at month's end. Requires a one-year service agreement. One coupon per new digital service line activation. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. Not combinable with any other air time offer. Coupon valid only at U.S. Cellular stores, kiosks, Wal-Marts and participating agents. Other restrictions and charges may apply. See store for details. Coupon expires June 30, 2000.

**U.S. Cellular**

**NOTICE Public Hearing**

The Chowan County Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing on Monday, July 10, 2000 at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioners Room, Courthouse. The purpose of this hearing is to receive comment on the proposal to not pave 2.2 miles of SR 1313 (West Bear Swamp Road) as proposed in the 2000 -01 Secondary Roads Program presented to the County Commissioners by NCDOT on June 2, 2000; but instead, to pave .4 mile to pass the one residence on the road. The County proposes to transfer the funds saved to other road projects.

**Lane's Family Bar-B-Que & Seafood**

**Pit Cooked BBQ Chicken & Pork Seafood • Vegetables • Desert**

Open 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Monday - Saturday  
Open 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. Sunday  
Closed July 4th & 5th Reopen July 6th

East Church Street • Edenton, NC  
Phone: 482-4008

**Buy a Nokia phone and get a \$30 gift certificate for Brickyard 400 merchandise. Plus, enter to win a trip for 2 to see the Brickyard 400.**

**U.S. Cellular**  
The way people talk around here.

**NOKIA**  
The Preferred Mobile Phone of the Brickyard 400

**Edenton** Chowan Crossing, Virginia Rd., (252)482-0844  
**Elizabeth City** 407 A.S. Griffin St., (252)338-9400  
**Goldsboro** 511-A Spence Ave., (919)778-6900  
**Henderson** 208 Dabney Dr., (252)430-8666  
**Kill Devil Hills** Seagate North Shopping Center, (252)441-3377  
**Reidsville** 1537 Fraeway Dr., (336)349-5325  
**Roanoke Rapids** 1110 East 10th Street, (252)535-9005

**Rocky Mount** 2518 Sunset Ave., (252)937-1811  
**Roxboro** 904-B Madison Blvd., (336)503-8997  
**Smithfield** 110 Ava Gardner Dr., (919)989-5801  
**Wilson** 1700 S. Raleigh Rd., (252)234-0051

**North Carolina Businesses:**  
For an on-site consultation, call (800)231-2355.  
For other great offers, visit one of our authorized agents.

Shop U.S. Cellular on the Internet at www.uscellular.com. Pick up a mail-in entry form at any U.S. Cellular location and you could win a trip for two to the Brickyard 400\* at Indianapolis Motor Speedway on August 5, 2000. Entries must be received by July 17, 2000 for your chance to win one of more than 100 prizes. No purchase necessary to win. Brickyard 400\* is a registered trademark of Indianapolis Motor Speedway Corporation, used with permission. Offer requires a new one-year service agreement. 1,200 minutes a month includes 200 peak minutes and 1,000 night & weekend minutes. Unused monthly minutes expire at month's end. Roaming charges, taxes and tolls not included. Other restrictions may apply. See store for details. Offer expires June 30, 2000.