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SARATOGA

Spotlight

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Saratoga
The Heart of Saratoga

The Swan Family
Supporting Our
Community & Country



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See page 7... 

Cover photo by Grant Atwell



Photos by Grant Atwell

The Swan Family - Supporting Our Community & Country

By Genevieve Laucher

The Swans' story as a family began when Chuck and Marianne met in Fort Lauderdale, Florida where Marianne was visiting from the Netherlands. When she and Chuck began talking, she didn't think he would know of her home town. However, he was very familiar since he had visited a neighboring town several times. Chuck, a veteran Merchant Mariner, spent his sophomore year at sea visiting several countries, while attending the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. He later sailed extensively as an engineering officer. Coincidentally, on several of his trips he had visited some shops just blocks away from Rotterdam, Netherlands, where Marianne studied.

Marianne, who taught special needs students and high school Dutch and English, returned to Europe to teach for a few more years before she and Chuck got married in the Netherlands. They then moved to Fort Lauderdale, where their oldest daughter, Vanessa, was born.

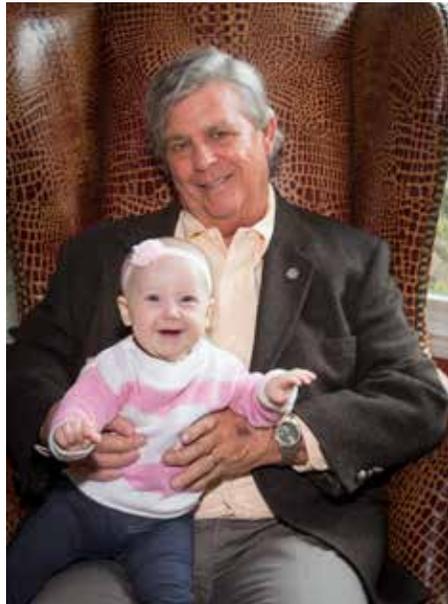
In 1981, the Swans moved to their downtown Saratoga home, where Chuck and Marianne still live. When

Vanessa began preschool, Marianne got a job in early childhood education and decided to go back to school for her doctorate. She also directed the Saratoga Community Gardens, where 6,000 schoolchildren visited each year to learn about our relationship with nature, and taught at West Valley and Mission Colleges. Chuck, who became a CPA in Florida, went on to lead several companies as CFO and currently is a consulting CFO, working with emerging growth companies as well as more established entities.

In Saratoga, the Swans added two more members to their family: their middle daughter, Allegra, and their youngest daughter, Olivia. Vanessa and Chuck were involved with the Valley Institute of Theatre Arts (VITA), and the younger daughters were named after two of the characters in plays that Vanessa performed: Allegra from Longfellow's "The Children's Hour" which was woven into VITA's Cherished Christmas Classics, and Olivia after the lead in the play "Oliver," which was played by a girl, renamed Olivia.

At very young ages, Allegra and Olivia began vaulting (performing gymnastics on the back of a moving horse) at Garrod Farms. All three girls participated in sports—

- FEATURE STORY -



Vanessa played volleyball and Olivia and Allegra played soccer and softball, which Chuck coached. But for Olivia and Allegra, their passion was vaulting, and they competed on the international level.

Meanwhile, Marianne started a “Mommy and Me” program teaching parents in the community what to look for in preschools. Because of her experience in early childhood education, she was asked to start a preschool, and opened the Saratoga Community Preschool in 1989. A parent participation program, it is located right behind City Hall, next to the Senior Center. One of the school’s activities is to bring together the preschoolers and the seniors, so the children often perform for the seniors and participate in activities together.

Because of Olivia’s love for horses and rehabilitating them, she intended to become a veterinarian, but found that she couldn’t put animals down. She later planned to study animal sciences. However, her strong empathy

for animals made it too difficult of a career for her, so she moved back to Saratoga to pursue her other passion, early childhood education. She also began coaching for the Mt. Eden Vaulting Club at Garrod Farms as well as working at Saratoga Community Preschool with children with special needs. She became passionate about special education, and went back to San Jose State to earn her Masters. She met her husband, Ryan Griswold, in San Luis Obispo. He also grew up in the Saratoga area, but they never met until college. Ryan now works as a mechanical engineer at Accel Biotech in Los Gatos. They were married in 2014, and just five months ago, they had their first child, their daughter Brooke.

Allegra went to UC Santa Barbara and earned her degree in English. While attending college she worked at Peet’s Coffee both in Saratoga and Santa Barbara. Allegra now works as a financial planner with a small group in Los Gatos and should have her Certified Financial Planning credential this year, and welcomes new clients. She loves mountain biking and hiking, and walks the Los Gatos Creek Trail with Marianne or Chuck during her lunch hour several times per week.

Vanessa, while working with the Youth Sciences Institute at Vasona, met her husband Matt Staudacher on a backpacking trip in the Trinity Alps. He works for the US Forest Service, so they move around to many beautiful places. They have two children: Luke, who is almost eleven, and Ellie, who is almost seven. They currently live in Idaho, where Vanessa is teaching special education. When they visit with the rest of the family in Saratoga, they spend a lot of time at Garrod Farms hiking and riding Olivia’s two horses.

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Over their years in Saratoga, Chuck and Marianne have been and still are members of many clubs and organizations. Marianne is a member of the Foothill Club and is on the Board of Directors for the Saratoga Foothill Club Historical Preservation Foundation. She chaired Saratoga Parks and Recreation Commission for several years. With Parks and Recreation, Marianne is on the Pedestrian, Equestrian, and Bicycle Trails Advisory Committee (PEBTAC), where she is working with the County, Peninsula Open Space District, and The San Jose Water Company to link a trail from the Saratoga Quarry to Sanborn Park, which connects to the Skyline to the Sea Trail.

Chuck is also a director of the Foothill Club Historical Foundation and is a director for the Veterans Memorial and Support Foundation of Los Gatos. He is a member and former president of The Saratoga Men's Club, and a member Saratoga Rotary where he had served as Finance Director for the Rotary Art Show. He also served the City of Saratoga as chairman of the Finance Commission when they developed the City's first capital budgeting process and computer replacement program as well as formalizing the City's reserve fund.

Chuck was recruited to the Veterans Memorial

Foundation by Mike Frangadakis, who is also a veteran and the founder of the committee who lives in Monte Sereno. Chuck is currently the only veteran of the Merchant Marine on the committee, and the only member from Saratoga. He is proud to represent the Merchant Marine, which was heavily involved in World War II, suffering a heavier casualty rate than any of the uniformed services, including the Marine Corps. The US Merchant Marine has supported our military in all wars from the Revolutionary War through the current Middle East conflicts. The Merchant Marine has participated in conflicts dating back to the Revolutionary War, participating even before the Navy or Coast Guard were formed. Chuck has seen the detailed sketches of the upcoming memorial in Los Gatos, and is very excited to soon have a local Veterans Memorial.

The Swan family is certainly very involved in the community in their work, play, and everything in between. Keep an eye out for them hiking, biking, horseback riding, teaching, shopping at the Wednesday and Saturday farmers' markets, and more in Saratoga!

Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share?
Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at glaucher@bestversionmedia.com.



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