

December 2021 Reefnotes
By Janet Newman

Everyone at The Reef has a story to tell. Penny and Dave Newkirk are no exception. The Newkirks were already familiar faces around The Reef before becoming owners in July. For the last three years, they had rented unit 141 for the winter and involved themselves in Friends of The Reef activities. Now that they are full-time residents, I'm sure we'll benefit even more from their involvement, especially with the special interest they have in the community garden.



Pictured with a sea turtle sculpture made from recycled materials.

(Take a closer look -- that's not a bunch of green bananas!)

Cooking has been a big part of Penny's life. She once co-owned a gourmet food and cookware store and deli which also offered cooking classes and catering. The business had grown to 19 employees when Penny decided she was getting further away from her love of teaching cooking and her mission to increase awareness of where real food comes from. She told Dave she wanted a farm, and he supported her dream of a property on

which she could both grow food and open a cooking school. Penny became a regular at the Kane County, Illinois, zoning meetings. Her persistence and persuasion – Dave refers to her as “the negotiator” – eventually paid off, and the Newkirks bought what they call a “derelict two-acre site with historic buildings on it.” They've done their part to maintain the history and rural character of the site, which includes a barn. Built in 1830, the barn is the oldest structure in the county. They preserved the barn and the 1860 house on the property, both of which now are on a historic registry. They purchased an 1847 house made of hand-made bricks from a nearby convent, had it moved to their farm, converted it into a cooking school, and also got it listed on a historic registry. They set about developing five different organic gardens – including herbs, vegetables, berries, perennials, and roses. After twenty years, the extensive gardens, coupled

with teaching obligations, had begun to be more than they wanted to handle. As Penny says, they had “gardened into oblivion.” So three years ago they listed the property for sale.

That’s about the same time they began to spend the winters at The Reef.

Penny and Dave’s first visit to St. Croix was nearly 36 years ago, the year Duggan’s first opened. They were staying at Divi Carini, which was an all-inclusive resort, but ventured out to enjoy a dinner at Duggan’s. They visited St. Croix again in the early 1980s, this time staying downtown at the Pink Fancy Hotel. In the intervening years, they visited other Caribbean islands, but when the time came that they could spend extended periods of time away from Illinois winters, they came to The Reef and felt warmly welcomed. When the owners of 141 decided to sell, the Newkirks decided to buy. The right buyer came along for their farm in Illinois, paving a way for them to now live at The Reef full-time with frequent visits back to the Chicago area, where their two sons’ families, including four grandchildren, live.

The Newkirks will have a special family Christmas on St Croix this year when eleven family members gather to celebrate the holidays. A special bonus will be the celebration of Penny and Dave’s 50th wedding anniversary.

As they settle into life on St. Croix, Dave, a retired civil engineer, feeds his voracious appetite for reading. He and Penny will continue to be active participants in the Friends of The Reef’s Book Club. Dave helped with last spring’s yard sale and this summer he worked on cleaning up the beach at Teague Bay. He’s the golfer in the family, although Penny is learning. They both participate in the Friday night scrambles, and Penny is enjoying the women’s Tuesday group. Penny is also learning about tropical gardening. For the last two years she has volunteered at the Art Farm, and she is now training to be a docent at the botanical garden so that she can conduct tours for cruise ship passengers. Both Dave and Penny love to travel and have several international locations yet on their bucket list.

After a lifetime of living in the same general location, the Newkirks are enjoying meeting new people from a variety of locales – all with stories to tell.