

The James Madison Experience

Holladay House owners keep historic inn in the JMU family BY JACQUELYN WALSH ('09)

The smell of fresh chocolate chip cookies wafts through the air as two couples sit in the richly decorated 1830s main parlor of a bed-and-breakfast. It's clear from the couple's conversations that Lewis "Pete" and **Phebe Goode Holladay ('75)**, and **Sam ('97)** and **Sharon Cohen Elswick ('98)** share a passion and responsibility for the historic setting.

The Holladay House Bed & Breakfast was first opened by Pete and Phebe Holladay in 1989. The historic inn is located on Main Street in Orange, Va., just a short trip from dozens of Virginia wineries and historic landmarks. Only three miles from James Madison's estate, Montpelier, the inn is a little over an hour from JMU. The house has witnessed 175 years of American history and hosted visitors like J.E.B. Stuart.

After living in the Metro-D.C. area, Sam and Sharon Elswick desired a change of pace. "We loved the Shenandoah Valley so much we wanted to get back to this type of location," says Sharon. After the Elswicks moved back to Virginia they began to think about owning their own bed-and-breakfast. Sharon quit her job to get hands-on training at an inn and winery. "As soon

as we saw the Holladay House, we knew that it could thrive," recalls Sharon. The Elswicks purchased Holladay House in 2006.

The inn has been featured in *The Washington Post* travel section with former guests describing Holladay House as "amazing" and lacking that "Staying-at-Grandma's Vibe." The inn also was featured on HGTV.com and TravelChannel.com for rich Virginia history and illustrious architecture.

Even though the Holladay family biscuits are an HGTV.com "Favorite Recipe" choice, Holladay House certainly is not your grandma's bed-and-breakfast. Breakfasts are made-to-order and feature vegetarian options like veggie breakfast sausage and seasonal fruits straight from a nearby farmers' market.

Typically, Sharon takes care of the baking and Sam does the cooking. When Pete and Phebe ran the inn, Pete was the bread maker. The Elswicks and the Holladays bond through their trials as inn owners and through their common Madison Experiences.

Sam, a history major, credits his Madison Experience for an intellectual awakening. "I would stack the JMU history department against any in the country," he says. "I would not be the person I am today if I had not gone to JMU." Sharon's favorite JMU experiences are her lifelong JMU friends.

JMU's stellar professors make a huge impact, adds Sam. "You can lose your way a little bit while trying to find your path, and they help you make the best decisions."

The Elswicks also enjoy the extended Madison Experience shared with JMU's eponym. "It is a boon to the local area to be so close to the ancestral home of fourth U.S. President James Madison," says Sharon. "We see a lot of JMU alums here."

Holladay House is one of the two oldest standing structures in

downtown Orange and is a contributing property to the town's historic district. At the crossroads of historic Routes 15 and 20 – James Madison Highway and Constitution Highway – the inn is a not-to-miss James Madison Experience. And the Elswicks are making the trip easy for Dukes through the "JMU Alumni Deals" program at www.jmu.edu/alumni/shop. The Holladay House Madison Experience includes two nights in the John Madison Suite, tickets to Montpelier, wine tasting passes and a "parting Madison gift."

In the Holladay House main parlor, Sharon and Phebe laugh as they talk about the joys and occasional struggles of running a business with

a spouse. "Pete told us that it is not for the faint of heart," says Sharon. Pete and Phebe's 35-year marriage and Sharon and Sam's collaboration show that it can be done.

The Elswicks' personalities also complement each other's schedules. A morning person, Sharon enjoys cooking her family's favorite breakfast recipes for guests and "breaking bread" with them. Since the inn has so many repeat guests, Sharon says they "keep the menu varied." Pete shares an opposite favorite time of the day – at night when all his guests are "relaxed."

Some Holladay family heirlooms still have a place in the house, including a 100-year-old China cabinet, according to Phebe. Like most inns, each room in the house has a unique name, and in a modern twist, the house offers wireless Internet access.

The Elswicks also take efforts to keep things green. "It's not always easy to keep things green and be environmentally savvy while managing an historic property," says Sharon, "but we do everything we can." ❧

*** Learn more at www.HolladayHouseBandB.com, or get your "Madison Experience Suite Deal" via the JMU Alumni website at jmu.edu/alumni/shop.**



Original Holladay House Bed & Breakfast owners Pete and Phebe Goode Holladay ('75), right, enjoy watching JMU alumni Sam ('97) and Sharon Cohen Elswick ('98) run the successful inn. (Inset): Holladay House is located in downtown Orange, Va., three miles from Montpelier.