

Developer Lehr Jackson brings the food, fun and camaraderie of the public market back to Easton and seeks to make Easton Market Square the town's heart and soul

Lehr Jackson has visions much in the same way legendary developer James Rouse had them. No doubt Jackson acquired some of his idealistic outlook while working for Rouse as a key player with The Rouse Company throughout much of the 1970s. Under Rouse, Jackson was part of the team tasked with working on "difficult projects." His work included the creation of America's first food court in Paramus Park Mall in New Jersey, the redevelopment of Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston and leasing retail space for the development of Harborplace in Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

"His attitude toward development and toward place making was really kind of infectious," said Jackson of Rouse, adding that Rouse believed in always striving for no less than excellence.

Four decades later, Jackson finds himself developing a project in Rouse's hometown of Easton – Easton Market Square. The project is adjacent to the first shopping center Rouse ever developed in 1954, Talbottown Shopping Center. Jackson has a home nearby in Bozman where he and his wife, Julia, who is originally from Salisbury, live about half the time. They also have a home in Baltimore.

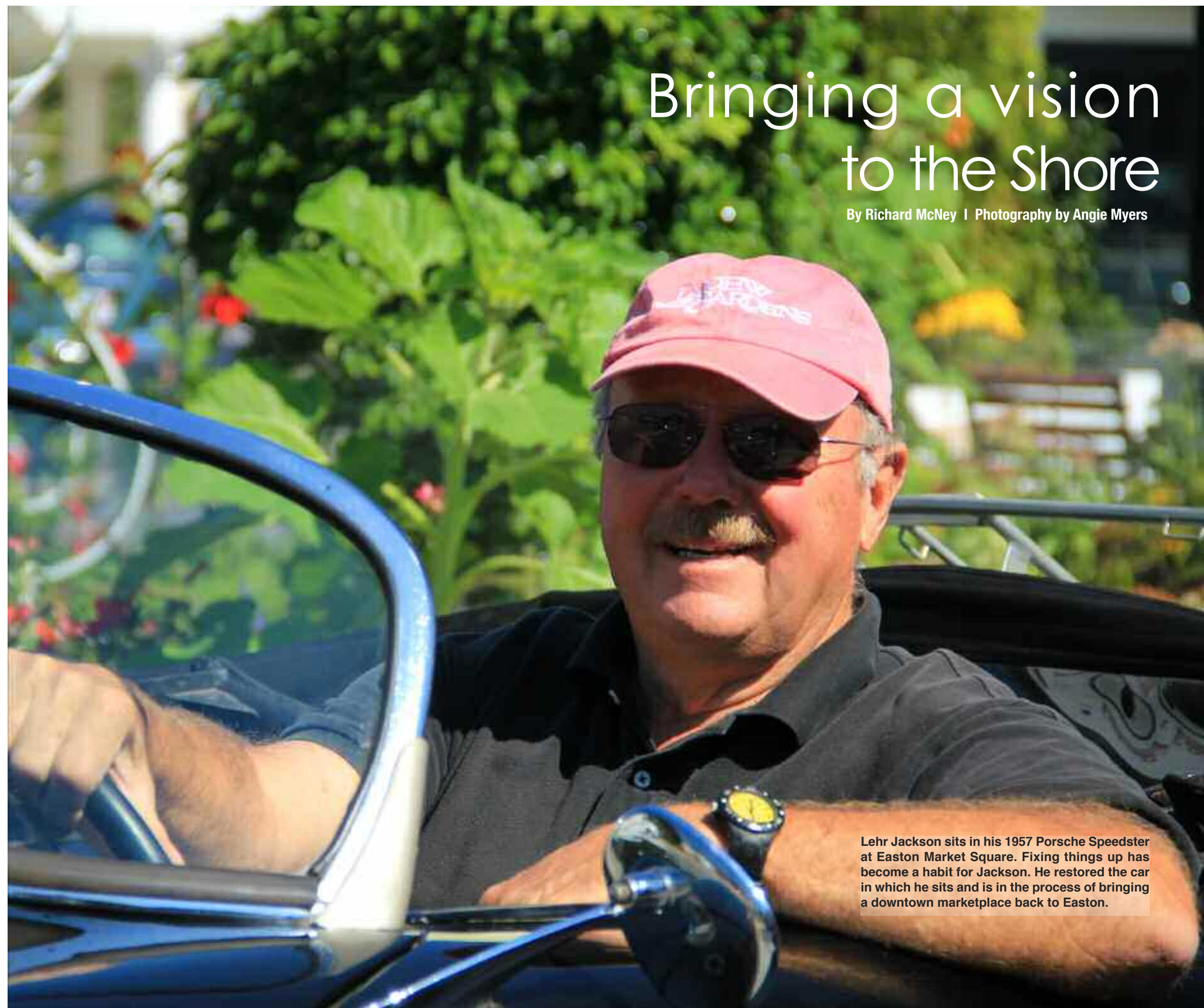
"I always liked Easton and I always liked Jim Rouse," Jackson said. "It is a great place." ►

“Visions describe what best should be, could be - if and when mankind has the will to make them real.”

– James Rouse, pioneering real estate developer, Easton native

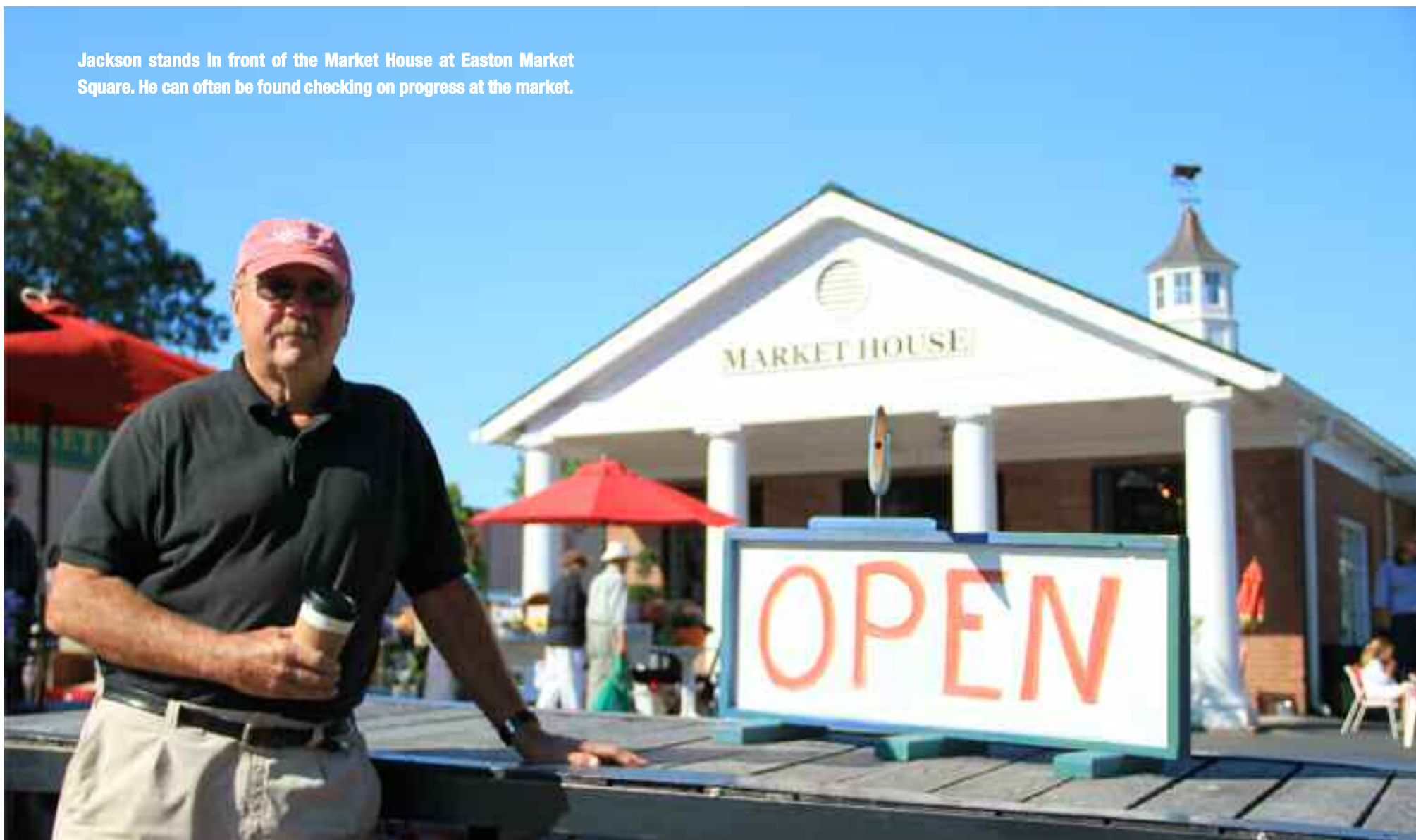
Bringing a vision to the Shore

By Richard McNey | Photography by Angie Myers



Lehr Jackson sits in his 1957 Porsche Speedster at Easton Market Square. Fixing things up has become a habit for Jackson. He restored the car in which he sits and is in the process of bringing a downtown marketplace back to Easton.

Jackson stands in front of the Market House at Easton Market Square. He can often be found checking on progress at the market.



A mural found on the side of one of Easton Market Square's buildings depicts a European-style market.

For Easton Market Square, Jackson has reclaimed an underused group of buildings and parking lots on North Harrison Street, located next to the parking lot where the Easton Farmer's Market is held in season on Saturdays. He envisions converting the space into a full-time public market that will serve as the community hub. Customers will visit the market to connect with farmers, shop owners and community.

Easton Market Square has been open since last April and while it has changed a lot in the last year, it remains a work in progress, Jackson said.

Jackson has long sought out underused and forgotten spaces, seeing possibilities where others do not and making those possibilities become reality through redevelopment.

He grew up on a farm near BWI that was later sold and developed into a shopping center. The experience led him to detest poorly planned suburban development. He graduated from the University of Virginia with a bachelor

of arts degree in economics in 1965.

From 1965 to 1970, he served in the U.S. Marine Corps and was deployed to Vietnam in 1968 and 1969, where he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and Navy Commendation Medal. At night he flew onboard missions and during the day he ran a social beach club for the Marine Aircraft Wing – his first experience developing a space for the enjoyment of others.

He joined The Rouse Company in 1970 and worked there until 1978 when he left and cofounded what later became known as Williams Jackson Ewing, a Baltimore-based specialty retail development company, with longtime collaborator and Rouse Company veteran Roy Williams. Michael Ewing joined the firm in 1983 after leaving The Rouse Company.

Williams Jackson Ewing earned a reputation as an authority on integrating retail and entertainment venues as a means to revitalize urban properties and redefine the way consumers shop. The firm boasts an impressive proj

ect list, including the restorations and revitalizations of Union Station in Washington, D.C., Grand Central Terminal in New York City, Suburban Square in Philadelphia and Belvedere Square in Baltimore. Another specialty was revitalizing college spaces. The firm's work included Sansom Common at the University of Pennsylvania, Palmer Square at Princeton University and Charles Square at Harvard University.

As consultants, the company worked on projects in Russia, China and Japan. Jackson was a major contributor to the radical retail development for Times Square in New York City and has authored, or co-authored, a number of leading edge strategic plans for urban development districts including Bunker Hill in Los Angeles, Playhouse Square in Cleveland, Lincoln Road in Miami Beach,

“If Lehr comes back from a trip to Europe, look out!”

Marmilla Street in Jerusalem, Tempozan in Osaka and MM21 in Yokohama, Japan.

He left the firm in 2006 with the idea of retirement ... or at least slowing down. Before long, he started Lehr Jack-

son Associates and began developing projects or partnering and consulting with a variety of private and public organizations to do so.

During a recent visit to Easton Market Square, Jackson stood in front of a computer hooked up to a large LCD television at the back of the market house and clicked through dozens of websites and videos of markets, restaurants and retail spaces from around the world. Some he had developed and others he had only visited and found inspiration through the experience.

“If Lehr comes back from a trip to Europe, look out!” said Kathleen Witte, who has worked with Jackson for 22 years and is his partner for the Easton Market Square project. ►



Above: Easton Market Square is a busy place on Saturdays. **Right:** A wide variety of goods are available at the market.



She has learned a lot from Jackson and said he remains flexible and open to suggestions or ideas and will change his mind, a trait that is rare for someone with so much expertise and so many accomplishments.

“Lehr always brings a great sense of enthusiasm and vision,” she said. “His enthusiasm is just contagious. He is extremely affable.”

Jackson believes that simple, uncomplicated places, with romantic and interesting food, a common occurrence in Europe, are now becoming popular in the U.S.

“Markets have been around for centuries and were really the meeting points for people,” he said. “Everybody came to the market early in the morning to get the best. We are seeing a return to this in America. We want to get people back in that habit again. We are trying to bring a European attitude, flavor and market in character to Easton.”

Easton Market Square’s Market House, the main building on the property, features an assortment of vendors who put their products on display and are not hesitant to interact with customers, answer questions or give out samples. Jackson compared finding the right merchants to casting a play.

“We cast the play and we screen the actors,” he said. “Our job is to make the customers come back. The scale, the attitude and vibrancy of a place is the magic, not just the architecture. It is the people. It is the play. You will see characters out here.”

Market goers can find a selection of pastries, desserts, bread and more at Praline Bakery, a mix of gourmet nuts and dried fruit offerings at Nuts to You or buy a crepe from Chez G. Crepes and Confections. Neopol Savory Smokery, which offers a variety of smoked meats, fish and cheeses inside the Market House, has received an amazing response from the community, according to Jeni Paik, who manages the stand. Paik, who grew up in Baltimore and worked at Neopol’s other location in the city’s Belvedere Square, moved to Easton and has been living there half the week since the second location opened.

“I love it here,” she said. “The people here are so welcoming.”

Seaberry Farm sells flowers, cut branches and specialty fruits at the Market House. Wenfei Uva and her husband, Richard, grow their products on their 36-acre farm in Federalsburg. ►

“We have a lot of regular customers who come back week after week,” Wenfei said. “We are doing very well.”

Other buildings at the market are home to Harrison’s Liquor Store, a fixture at the corner of Harrison and Washington for decades, and Jean McHale Antiques, Design and Fine Art, formerly of Baltimore.

The owners of 208 Talbot in St. Michaels, brothers-in-law and business partners Brendan Keegan and Brian Fox, plan to open a new restaurant called Brasserie Brightwell at the market by the end of October. Keegan will serve as chef and Fox will manage the front of the house and oversee the wines, beer and cocktails.

The restaurant is described as a casual 120-seat European brasserie with an American feel. The menu will include escargot in garlic butter, frog legs, French onion soup gratinee, a 10-oz. Brasserie burger, whole grilled bronzino or whole roasted Maine lobster. Entrees of fresh fish, beef, lamb, pork and poultry will also be available daily. The restaurant will have an open exhibition kitchen, a counter where guests can dine and watch the cooks in action, a spacious main dining room and garage doors that open to a large outdoor patio dining area complete with a fireplace and bar.



Jackson has several other merchants lined up for the market in the near future and many distant plans, including the construction a seafood market café and butcher shop café.

“You start with nothing or something not very exciting and you transform it into something that is really functional and usable and something that people really embrace,” Jackson said of the process. “That is really the fun part of it.”

Projects never come to him, but instead, he will drive by or visit a location and recognize it as an underutilized space with potential.

“My mind just never stops,” he said. “I don’t sleep at night. I always think about things.”

In addition to being his job, restoration is also a hobby for Jackson. During a visit with his wife to Bethel, Del., the birthplace of her father, he bought a house that “looked like it was ready to fall down.” They fixed it up and lived in it for 28 years.

Fixing up old cars, particularly American and German cars, has been one of his lifetime hobbies.

“I really get great enjoyment out of it,” he said. “You see a car on the side of the road and if it still runs and you can buy it for \$600 ... I am kind of a sucker for it.”

He has two 1957 Porches, a Coupe and a Speedster, that he drives all the time.

“They are not precious, they are just fun,” he said.

The same can apply to his work. While his projects are often beautiful, their main function is serving the end user – the community.

Both of Jackson’s college-age sons have worked on projects with their father. Lehr Jr. is studying computer science at the University of Baltimore and Peter is an urban planning student at Columbia University.

Jackson is on to the initial stages of his next project – another market. He is in negotiations, through his company Gone to Market LLC, to redevelop the Annapolis Market House, which has sat nearly vacant in recent years.

“It is dysfunctional now and doesn’t work the way it needs to,” he said. “Our plan is nothing magical; it is just to give back Annapolis to the people who live there. That could be a great catalyst to the revival of the harbor.” Another vision to make reality. *Lehr Jackson Associates* – www.lehrjacksonassociates.com **S**

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