



Jane Morgan Smith with her truffle hunters, Friday and Dazy.

# Keep Your Fork – The Best Is Yet to Come!

Who Knew that Retirement Would Bring a World of Truffles?

**K**eeP Your Fork is the name of the truffle farm that Jane Morgan Smith and her husband, Rick, own. It could also be the title of her life story.

Jane was born and raised in High Point and spent most of her career in office work. As she and her husband started thinking about their eventual retirement, they decided they wanted to provide for a good second income by 2004. So in 1992 they bought some land in King and planned to grow shiitake mushrooms and perhaps other crops.

Then fate intervened, and Jane had retirement thrust on her several years ahead of plan. She was one of many who were offered an early out when Wachovia was merged into First Union.

“I decided to make a complete change,” she said. “I took my severance package and enrolled in the massage therapy program at Forsyth Tech. I loved it.”

Jane was in the first therapeutic massage program at Forsyth Tech that led to a diploma. Earlier classes had been part of the Continuing Education division.

“The program was in transition, and I was in transition,” she said. After graduating, she set up her own therapeutic massage practice, Art of Healing.

Meanwhile, back at the farm, the Smiths were introduced to another mushroom farmer, Franklin Garland of Hillsborough. He was getting out of the mushroom business and getting into truffles, a crop that was then almost unknown in North Carolina. The Smiths were intrigued, and planted their first filbert trees in 2000, knowing that no truffles would be growing among their roots for several years.

“You’re at the mercy of nature,” Jane said. Even now, she estimates that only 10 percent of the more than 100 trees they first planted have produced truffles.

She recently heard a major league Spanish truffle

farmer speak, who said that he had a 37-year-old tree that had just produced truffles for the first time. “That’s the kind of mystery we’re dealing with,” she said.

After planting that first orchard, the Smiths bought adjacent land for another orchard, and now have nine acres, the smallest farm on the tax records of Stokes County. And the Smiths are no longer such a rare breed – now there are more than 100 truffle farms in North Carolina, thanks mostly to the efforts of Franklin Garland. The industry is progressing in much the same way that North Carolina’s wine industry has developed.

“I decided I would end up with whichever needed me most, the massage practice or the farm,” Jane said. The farm won, and she phased out the last of her massage clients in 2009.

The truffle business engages a lot of her energy, though not in the sense of toil and sweat. She can’t imagine herself milking cows or gathering eggs, and she never dreamed that she would have any connection to agriculture. But growing truffles is not particularly labor intensive. There’s orchard maintenance three seasons of the year, and the winter harvest.

This farmer could be compared to Johnny Appleseed, spreading the word about how to grow and enjoy a crop that is new to this region. Jane makes presentations to garden clubs, gives advice to new truffle farmers, and serves as the president of the North American Truffle Growers Association. She was involved in planning the first National Truffle Fest, which was held last March in Asheville. And a particularly exciting opportunity to educate Americans about truffle growing came in January 2007 when Martha Stewart came to the farm. The show in which Jane, her truffle dog Friday and Martha Stewart walked Keep Your Fork Farm’s orchards was broadcast nationally a few weeks later.

“We’ve learned so much we can share with other people,” Jane said. “I’m always answering questions and networking with other farmers.”

Long ago, before she had any office skills, before she learned massage therapy, before she knew the first thing about fungi, Jane imagined that she would one day be a teacher. And as mysteriously as a truffle developing below the ground, the pattern has emerged.

“That’s really what I am now; I’m a teacher,” Jane said.

The farm motto – the best is yet to come – holds true. Beginning to harvest the rewards feels good to Jane, like a long-held dream finally coming to fruition. 🍄



Friday (left) took to truffle hunting like a duck to water. Dazy (below) is still learning.



## Never Fear, Friday Is on the Case

Pigs were the original truffle hunters. They sniffed out the tasty fungi in order to eat them. Today, truffle growers all over the world rely on obedient dogs rather than hungry hogs. To know if there are truffles ready to be harvested, Jane depends on a border collie she trained.

“I took little pieces of truffle and wrapped them and hid them in the house. I’d give Friday (named for another detective, Sgt. Joe Friday of the old “Dragnet” series) the scent, and say ‘Find Mama nut-nut,’” she said. “Then I started hiding pieces of truffle wrapped in foil outside. I also took a length of PVC pipe and punched holes in it and put truffles in it. I closed off both ends so he could use it as a toy. Friday got really good, really fast.”

Friday loves to work and has a strong work ethic, Jane said, but the young dog she is training, Dazy, is not quite as focused.

“Friday’s reward is play. Dazy’s is treats,” she said. “The intention is for Dazy to become a truffle dog.” 🍄



A little taste of truffle goes a long way. This jar of truffle butter will flavor enough pasta for four people.

## Black Diamonds

Keep Your Fork Farm is the only farm in Stokes County that has harvested the Black Périgord Truffle, named for the Périgord region in France. The Smiths use the price the French set on this rare delicacy – \$800 per pound, or \$50 per ounce.

Prized by the ancient Romans as an aphrodisiac, truffles have no particular nutritional value. What creates the high demand for them today is a taste like no other.

“I had never tasted a truffle until I met the Garlands,” Jane said. “I liked them immediately. They’re a little mushroomy, but completely unique.”

Truffles are so wildly expensive that restaurant chefs buy them by the ounce. Fortunately, a little goes a long way, and bits of truffle can be used to give a rich and delicious taste to pasta or omelets or other dishes.

These fungi grow from spores that attach to the roots of a few varieties of trees. The roots

of seedling trees are actually dipped in the spores. Truffles will only grow in soil that has a very high pH and is regularly irrigated. Even when all the conditions are right, the yield can be small.

Jane sells some of the truffles to individuals and some to area restaurants. She also makes truffle butter, which is sold at Reynolda Farm Market and the Briar Patch. “We like it on warm bread,” Jane said.

Even as more people become acquainted with the luxurious taste of a truffle and more North Carolinians cultivate them, Jane said truffles are so elusive that the demand will always exceed the supply.

“The supply has dwindled, worldwide, from thousands of tons to hundreds of tons. Even in France, where they used to grow naturally, they have to be cultivated. This is going to be a lucrative market for a long, long time.”

Find out more about the care and finding of truffles – [www.keepyourforkfarm.com](http://www.keepyourforkfarm.com) 🍄



### More Than You Know



## Her Day Job Is Fun, Too

Jane Morgan Smith’s association with, and affection for, Forsyth Tech began when she enrolled in the therapeutic massage program. Later she worked part time with Project Skill-UP, a Forsyth Tech workforce training program in Walnut Cove. The productive relationship with her alma mater continues today. Jane is assistant director for StokesCORE, a non-profit organization that was founded as a response to the declining tobacco industry, plant closings, job cuts and corporate downsizings, which have had a severe impact on the county. Forsyth Tech is one of the partners in the organization, along with Workforce Development, Sertoma 4-H Educational Center and NC Cooperative Extension.

Jane works from an office at Camp Sertoma, and from her home office, and the staff meets at coffee shops and restaurants. This kind of fluidity is mostly welcome to Jane.

“At Wachovia, I had my desk and everything organized at my desk,” she said. “StokesCORE is more entrepreneurial. You’re not always in the same place with the same people.” 🍄