

**JOHN & CHAROLETTE SWEET**

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Dear Friends and Family,

When we left you last year Char was contemplating a new year free of community obligations and John was looking forward to retiring from business life. Well, neither of those things quite happened. To be sure Char went off the Arts Council board and shut down the food co-op and stopped going to steering committee meetings for the radio station. However, she continues to arrange the art exhibits at the library and ran the Art and Photography exhibit at the county fair and even got suckered into one of the money raising projects for WVLS. (I'm beginning to think getting out of town is the only way to get uninvolved.) John continues to be John R. Sweet Company — the man who wants to buy the business had a bout with cancer last summer, closely followed by domestic strife. He's still interested, however, so maybe 2005 will be the year.

We don't usually talk much about our extended family, but here's an update for those of you who know the kids. The whole family seemed to be ready for lifestyle change in 2004. Bev [oldest daughter] and Charlie made some major changes, including major renovation and decoration of their house. Charlie resigned from teaching at North Penn High School and is now at Home Depot. Beverly shook loose of her volunteer obligations and has taken a part time job in Customer Service at a local clothing store. We think college tuition and house renovations inspired this move, but she is enjoying it and finds it doesn't take any more time and energy than all the stuff she was doing for free. Alta contemplates no career change (still with Cargill), but Stephanie [middle daughter] has found that she's burning out and intends this to be her last year teaching at St. Theresa's. She will be substitute teaching next year while she takes classes to become a reading specialist. Kathy [youngest daughter] still likes her job at Carilion Medical Center and is being groomed to take over her boss' job next year sometime (boss is retiring). She's still making jewelry which she sells here in Monterey, and is branching out into tile mosaics.

Grandchild status: Doug is teaching in a small town north of New Orleans (hopefully out of the flood plain), Lynne is graduating from Millersville University even as we speak (in 3½ years — unheard of for a music student) and has been hired by a school district to start immediately, replacing someone on maternity leave. Curt graduated high school last spring and is about to enter Millersville in January. [These are Bev's kids] Julia and Kevin [Steph's kids] are becoming unrecognizable as they barrel into adolescence. Julia (just 15) entered high school this year and Kevin (13 last July) is in 8<sup>TH</sup> grade. The Brondanis came here last summer for a great visit (but far too short — we hardly had time to get reacquainted before they had to leave).

Char started taking classical violin lessons this fall. Since she's been playing classical music at Garth Newel at the Chamber Music Retreat and playing in the classical music concert here in Highland, she thought it might be worthwhile to find out how to do it. And it has been enlightening! She's still playing fiddle music and has been playing with a couple of other people pretty regularly.

Last winter, while Char was getting out of Arts Council, John took on the task of constructing a web site for them. He is also doing a web site for the group opposing wind turbines locally. Meanwhile, farm work goes on apace, completing the tractor shed, building new fence, upgrading roads, and (of course) the ongoing chores of wood cutting, hay making, and general care of our animals, all of which are getting along fine as of now. For more on all of these activities please visit our updated web site:

<http://johnrsweet.com/Personal/>

as well as the Arts Council site:

<http://highland-arts.com/>

You may or may not know that every year a different state is chosen to supply the National Christmas Tree — the one in front of the Capitol (not the White House Tree on the Ellipse). Did you realize there were two national trees? This year Virginia is the state. The Architect of the Capitol has the job of going to the designated state and finding its best tree (ahem!). He selected a red spruce in the Laurel Fork area of Highland County.



The tree was cut on Election Day, brought out of the woods by helicopter and flown to a field behind the Fair Grounds. It was quite a sight floating across Monterey! A crane took over control from the helicopter and held it suspended for a day or two for viewing. It was then laid in a cradle on a truck and trussed for travel.



Then it was wrapped in a big translucent plastic bubble decorated with all sorts of Virginia decals and icons, including the Highland County seal, ready for travel to Washington. Children from all over Virginia made more than 10,000 ornaments and sent them to Washington. Each child's name was put into a hat and the child whose name was drawn got to be the one to pull the switch that lights the tree. And can you imagine! The name drawn was

a child from Monterey! Three bus loads of people went to Washington to see the tree lighting ceremony and see "our tree" in place. There is even more about our tree on our web site.

Come visit with us, stay in our cabin, and enjoy the glories of Highland County.

Love to all,

*Char & John*

