



Ed & Francine Rodger

Contributing to the Community for Over 50 Years

By Jenna Caputo/ Photos by Matt McClosky, McClosky Photography

“Libraries had always been a part of my life, from walking to my local branch in Brooklyn and working in the libraries at Cornell University, so when we came to the area in 1966, I looked for a library but found there were none in the area,” says Francine Rodger.

Born in Brooklyn and attending high school on Long Island, Francine enjoyed swimming at the Steeplechase Swimming Pool and in the Great South Bay, as well as walking to movies, and of course, library visits.

Meanwhile, her husband, Ed, was born in Nyack, NY and grew up in southern Connecticut, spending time outdoors hunting, shooting, fishing and sailing.

They both ended up at Cornell University, where they met, and married in 1963 after graduation. Ed received his degree in Mechanical Engineering and began working for New York Telephone (NYT) in Utica, where they lived for a few months before he was relocated to the Capital District. After 10 years with NYT, he decided to switch to the NYS Department of Public

Service doing utility regulation and service quality to avoid another transfer with NYT since their family was so established in Saratoga County.

Francine’s degree in Food & Nutrition helped her begin her career in the hospital field, first working in Albany Memorial Hospital as a line dietitian, then becoming the Head of the Dietary Department at Cohoes Hospital before taking some time off to raise their family. She eventually became the Food Service Director of the Ballston Spa Central School District for three years then for Shenendehowa Central School District for 18 years.

Initially, Francine went down to the Colonie Library for her “book fix,” but in 1968, local residents decided to band together to start a library in Clifton Park, and Francine and Ed were more than happy to join them.

At the time, Clifton Park was almost entirely rural. There were not even any traffic lights when the Rodgers first moved here! “When we arrived, there were no supermarkets, hardly any doctor offices, no shopping venues and nowhere to get a cup of coffee

after 9pm,” says Francine. “Over the years, we got grocery stores, restaurants, physicians’ offices, movie theaters, traffic, widened roads, roundabouts, all sorts of things! Slowly, our trips down the Northway decreased as we could get what we needed in town. The farms turned into housing developments, parks were developed, sports venues, all sorts of changes! In 1967, I got the only copy of the *NY Times Sunday Edition* at the Country Dollar, a small full-service market of sorts in Halfmoon on Grooms Road. There was a go-cart track where the mall is today. The changes came swiftly, then slowed down for a while, then took off with a vengeance again. Both towns have had growing pains, but still remain a great place to live!”



As Clifton Park expanded and many young families began to fill the new residential subdivisions, the demand for a library increased. In 1968, the Shenendehowa Free Library Association worked to create a plan that would fit the town’s needs. The small library began in borrowed space over the First National Bank and Trust Co. (now KeyBank) at the corner of Routes 9 and 146. Funding was provided through public contributions and contracts for services with Clifton Park and Halfmoon. Interest took off and the space immediately became too small. In 1970, the library moved to one of the old vacated schoolhouses, and they hired a professional librarian as Director, while focusing on obtaining the funds needed to keep the library operating long term.

Francine helped create The Friends of the Shenendehowa Free Library in 1973 to focus on fundraising, and they initiated a number of activities, the most popular of which was the annual Dinner Dance that became a major community social event throughout the 1970s. But they needed a permanent site for the growing library. They took to the community once again and raised enough money to begin construction. The new 4,600 square foot building opened in 1981 but couldn’t keep up with the growing community demand. The library landed in its current 55,000-square-foot home on December 11, 2006.

Now celebrating the library’s 50th Anniversary, Ed and Francine helped create a new non-profit support group, the Clifton Park Halfmoon Library Foundation, to provide additional

resource assistance to support projects and programs that would be hard to come by through the regular budget process.

Francine and Ed have been instrumental in the library’s development from the very beginning, even adding Ed’s name, along with Larry Burke, to guarantee the mortgage for the new space since the group had only raised about half the needed money at the time. Francine served on the Board for 17 years in the ‘70s and ‘80s, and Ed joined the Board in the ‘90s and is currently serving as a Trustee. In December 2006, they were honored with the library’s Citizen Laureate Award for their involvement over the first 50 years, and the Local History Room was renamed the Ed & Francine Rodger Local History Room. Francine is now the President of the Foundation Board of Directors. Ed is a Director along with four others, and they are looking to add more for a total of nine. They welcome any interest from the community who wants to assist in maintaining the beautiful new library and help it grow into the future.

The library isn’t their only community activity. Francine is also the Chair of the Senior Services Committee of CAPTAIN Community Human Services. This group supports services to help seniors stay in their own homes for as long as they want. “We work to support Care Links and its volunteers, have done fundraising over the years and also work on many projects that support senior needs,” says Francine. “Few people know that there are as many seniors in our community as school-aged children! We span the ages from 65-90+ and are a diverse and challenging population. We constantly need more volunteers to lend a helping hand, for whatever time they have, whatever their skill, we can put it to use, especially now in this ‘trying’ time.” She also works with Shenendehowa Neighbors Connecting, a local “village” that supports seniors as well.

In addition, Francine is involved in the League of Women Voters, working to promote citizen involvement and voter education. As a founding member in the local chapter, the League has now been a big part of her life for the last 50 years. As the co-chair of a project she initiated 12 years ago, she helps oversee Vote411, an online voter guide that includes information on candidates for all elections, including school districts. This information also includes candidates’ answers to questions posed



by the League. In addition, she chairs the County Governance Committee, which examines the current Saratoga County government structure; chairs the monthly book club; sends out the publicity for all the events; initiated the Remote The Vote program, which works to increase voter registration in the county and allows for online registration and assists with the Take Me to Vote Programs.

Take Me to Vote is a program open to all 2,500 fifth-grade students in the county to encourage future voters to become more involved. "Studies indicate that children who went with their parents to vote are more likely to become voters in their adulthood," says Francine. Each child receives a brochure that is stamped when they go to the polls with their parents. They turn it in to their teacher and receive a patriotic-themed button. The class with the highest percent participation in the school gets a plaque. The highest participation in each of the four Assembly districts gets an even bigger plaque, and the class receives a visit from their assembly person. "Reimagining the program for this year will be challenging," says Francine, but they are working on coming up with a solution.

In the meantime, Ed served on the Shenendehowa School Board and on several school committees as well as on a couple of county committees, including the Traffic Committee and the US Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Francine and Ed's family now includes their four children Christine, Caroline, Dave and Rob and six grandchildren ages 15-27. Travel and the appreciation of other cultures have always been important in their family life. Previously a host for a foreign exchange teacher that spent a semester teaching at Shen, they continued hosting students from Germany, Spain, Japan and Brazil through the American Field Service (AFS) Program. All of their own children also participated in the program while in high school and studied abroad in France, Germany and Greece.



"The big takeaway is that teenagers are the same the world over," says Ed. "Our exchange students were quite accomplished, all having at least two languages and having to demonstrate some achievement in order to be included in the exchange programs, but they still agonized over going to the prom, trying to finesse their host parents to take a day trip or overnight trip to New York City, and all the other craftiness that late teenagers are capable of. We learned to listen to them, to set limits and to love and care for them. We are still in touch with them 30 years later and they consider us their American parents."

They have also enjoyed a lot of traveling themselves. After Ed retired, they bought a 41-foot cruising boat and traveled through the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, the New York and Canadian Canals and Lake Champlain, sometimes living on the boat for as much as six months at a time. "When we were on our boat, it was like we had left the rest of the world behind. There is another whole life and population at the water's edge – very laid back, very unencumbered by time, and people helping each other. Cruising along a river or canal is much different from boating on a lake or the ocean. Around every corner is something new to see!" says Ed. In addition to their cruises, they've taken cross-country trips on train, traveled the southern border from Florida to California, toured the Midwest, came up along most of the Mississippi and even made it to Alaska. Ed also received his Private Pilot License in the 1970s and enjoyed flying small airplanes for a few years until the demands of their growing family and the fuel shortages of the '70s took over.

When not helping out with the library, Francine and Ed enjoy a day out with friends at the Capital Rep Theater with a potluck dinner afterwards and are excited for the day that it is safe to go back to the theater. Once the pandemic settles down, they look forward to not only getting a haircut, but heading out to the gym and becoming physically active within the community that has brought them so much, to serve and contribute as much as they can. "I have worked with the greatest people and feel very grateful for the friendships I have made over the years," says Francine. "Always try to contribute whatever you can to the community. You will get back so much more than you give!"

If you are interested in participating with the Clifton Park Halfmoon Library Foundation, contact Francine at 518-331-4011.