

# Turning of the Wheel

by Patty Jo Sawvel



"Summer Freedom" by Caroline Domenig is fondly called "Bye-Cycle" by Richard.



Right: Artist & author Richard Hedgecock hanging out in his Studio at 105 N. Main Street watching the wheels turn in downtown Kernersville.

A guy can learn a lot from staying in one place and keeping his eyes opened. Such is the case with Richard Hedgecock. He has been perched in the center of downtown Kernersville for 37 years and has seen more than countless cars driving by. Richard has witnessed the turning of the wheel.

"Several years ago," explained Richard, "one of the town's aldermen warned me, 'Richard, you ought to get out of downtown. Kernersville is going downhill and it will never recover.' He was right. It did go downhill, but then the wheel turned and it has come back!"

Just up the road from Richard's studio is Körner's Folly. Richard had watched as bricks fell off the majestic walls and sunk deep into the very mud from which they were drawn. By all accounts, it looked as though the Folly was doomed. But then the wheel turned.

"Folks got together and pulled the past forward. They added new relevance. They created a continuum. They restored the image of Kernersville," Richard said appreciatively.

About that same time, people started talking about creating a festival that would bring the community together; much like Körner's Folly did in its heyday.

"People talked about creating Spring Folly for years," Richard recalled. "But it was all talk. It was not until Arnold King got involved that the idea got some traction and became a reality."

Today Spring Folly is rated as one of the Top 20 Festivals in the Southeast. Alive with entertainment, crafters, music, magic shows, and food—this annual festival will likely continue for generation after generation.

"Spring Folly brings together all the best elements of Kernersville and its Historic District. I could watch it all from my doorstep, but I am right out there in it," Richard said.

Next door to Richard's is a reincarnation of Charlie Snow's Ice Cream and Sandwich Shop. According to Richard, it has stayed true to its original identity. It is still a place where everyone is welcome to share a cup of coffee and a conversation. David Fitzpatrick gave the wheel a good turn when he opened Fitz on Main.

People are wheels too. Richard watched as "Moses" set up in the middle of town. He brought his lawn chair, his water bottle, and his simple sign that reads, "Jesus said repent." One day, Richard talked with him. The man was so authentic that Richard put this character to canvas and hung him on the wall.

"In his lifetime," Richard said curiously, "this man has spun around 180 degrees. He went from being the guy who did everything wrong, to being 'saved.' He now operates a soup kitchen and calls people to repent. That is his ministry."

Richard Hedgecock is a wheel too. He has rolled through some fertile ground—rich in beauty, knowledge, and experience—and captured a small portion of it in oils. But even the best paintings are merely a shadow of the essence of true beauty.

In December, Richard will turn 70. "I am on the other side of the bye-cycle. The wheel is turning. I wonder what I will see if I stick around another 37 years?" mused Richard with a wink.