



Sharing their expertise

Michael Rouse, who is active in the Good Cheer Self-Sufficiency Society, which is based out of the Lower Granville Hall in Port Royal, keeps bees to become more self-sufficient. **CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS**

Grassroots movement towards self-sufficiency sprouting in Port Royal

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Life is different for Kari and Matt Rouse and their five-year-old daughter, Faith, since they relocated in December from frantic city life in Oregon to their small homestead nestled on a hill overlooking the Annapolis River in Port Royal.

Now, the family gets to start most mornings without the shriek of an alarm clock rousting them to battle traffic on their way to client meetings for their internet marketing business.

Instead, Kari strolls in the salty morning breeze while inspecting her dahlia field whistling with the chickadees and singing with the blue jays and song sparrows on the way to open the door of the hen house.

"We were tired of the rat race," she said. "Our goal was to move deeper into the homesteading and self-sufficient life."

Kari said the family made the move for various reasons, including affordability, safety, and a new start, but gained so much more.

"The sense of community, the ability to start building our dream, and a profound sense of peace," she said. "Plus, I'm not afraid of a little hard work along the way."

Even with the hard work, the couple knew they would need the advice of family and like-minded friends in the community to achieve their goals.

"The act of homesteading requires so many skills, including water management, soil building, livestock maintenance, food preservation, goal setting, time management, and so much more," Kari said.

To learn some of those skills, the couple joined Matt's parents, who had already moved to the area from Ontario, in becoming active in a local grassroots movement called the Good Cheer Self-Sufficiency Society.

Kari's father-in-law, Michael Rouse, said he has come to rely on the knowledge and experience of the people active in the society.

"One guy is kind of an expert in root cellars and somebody else is an expert in growing organic vegetables. A lady up the road makes her own cheese and sourdough



Faith Rouse and her parents, Kari and Matt, are enjoying learning to raise chickens on their homestead in Port Royal.

bread," he said. "There is so much knowledge and expertise and they are all members of the society because they are all interested in sustainability. So, we provide information to each other. It is like a market. It is an exchange of knowledge. And they are all good people."

For Michael, the hard work of the self-sufficient lifestyle pays off in the kitchen.

"I love to cook so I wanted to improve the quality of my inputs for cooking. So being self-sufficient and doing it organically was really attractive," he said. "There is absolutely no comparing the flavour of a sweet pepper that came out of your garden with the stuff you can buy in the grocery store."

Kari said the society helps build the knowledge needed to thrive in homesteading.

"It is such a blessing to be able to ask for help or advice when needed."

She attended a presentation on greenhouses and hoop houses facilitated by the society soon after moving to the area. Then she helped film a tour of local chicken coops the society used for a presentation.

"I think those are important skills that have been forgotten and put aside. And



Kari and Matt Rouse, and their daughter Faith, moved to Port Royal from Oregon to learn about homesteading and the self-sufficient life.

this particular environment, such as winter greenhouse gardening, saving seeds," she said.

However, Clark said she has also learned a lot from the presentations facilitated by the society, especially about raising chickens.

"We have been teachers and learners. It goes both ways. That's the beauty of these kinds of community societies," she said.

"The society is really valuable for people who think they want to move back to the land and try to make a life on the land. Many of them have no experience and have very few resources."

Medea and Allan Holtz, who moved to the area from the United States in 2016, are the founders of the Good Cheer Self-Sufficiency Society. Medea is also one of the organizers, along with Kathy Brooks and Rick Ketcheson.

"Easing into retirement, we wanted to develop a more self-sufficient lifestyle. Principally because we love to eat well," Medea said.

"We came here to grow our own food and live close to nature. And to us, the best way to have a supply of wonderful food is to grow it yourself. Then you are not dependant on what is going on in the grocery stores. And we like the idea of no chemicals on our food. We also found that organic food is frightfully expensive and not very fresh."

Medea said the society, which began in 2018, started to flourish as concerns about the food supply chain began to surface during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There was a lot of fear. It was a very odd and scary time for a lot of people," she said.

"Going to the grocery store and not being able to buy some things was very alarming to a lot of people. A lot of people were panicking about food. You could not buy a freezer in the area. It was really hard to find canning jars. It was obvious people were thinking about growing and preserving their own food."

Holtz said the society's presentations now draw people from as far away as Margaretsville and Meteghan.

"People are dedicated and they are really getting a lot out of it," Holtz said. "Like a plant, the group has really matured in three years."

NEED TO KNOW

Good Cheer Self-Sufficiency Society

- **What** – A community networking group for those with goals of self-sufficiency.
- **History** – The group was founded in 2018 by Medea and Allan Holtz. Medea said the name denotes a happy group of folks from various backgrounds who share a common interest in eating well, who want control over their food supply and are dedicated to sustainable practices in harmony with nature. They emphasize localizing resources such as food, water, energy and skills while building a community, sharing wisdom, knowledge and materials and trading and bartering goods and services.
- **Medea Holtz said:** "It is having a sense of fulfillment that you know where your food came from, and you produced it yourself from seed."
- **Future** – The society would like to develop a community kitchen and life skills courses focusing on small building construction, floor tiling, raised bed and trellis construction, setting up a water catchment system and planting trees. There is also interest in creating a resource library and a demonstration garden to teach how to grow food and try innovative practices.
- **Upcoming meeting** – The society is hosting the Port Royal Mushroom Walk and Workshop on Saturday, Oct. 2, at the Lower Granville Hall.
- **Interested** – For more information, visit www.LowerGranvilleHall.com/events.html, email LowerGranvilleHall@gmail.com, or call Medea Holtz at 902-955-1955.

I think it's very good for humans to work outside, live outside, be more involved in nature."

Kari said their long-term goal is to be able to feed themselves year-round, supplementing with staples only as needed.

"Every skill we add makes us more sufficient as a com-

munity and as individuals."

Niki Clark and her husband Ian Curry have been organic mixed farmers and market gardeners in Granville Beach for some time. They have been active in the society, sharing their expertise with the other members.

"We have a lot of expertise in growing things in