

Press Release

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Two former Wine Rack customers to become its owners

Southport – Amy Stafford and Karen “KJ” Johnston are good pals, as are their husbands. Together the foursome has spent numerous Friday evenings enjoying the fine wine and education they’ve received at The Wine Rack on Howe Street. In a few weeks, Amy and KJ will move to the figurative other side of the bar when they take over the business. The change—including a slight change of name, from The Wine Rack to Wine Rack (WR) — will take place April 2. The pair plans to operate the business before closing for about a week in mid-May to make building and grounds improvements before the planned Memorial Day weekend grand reopening.

“Ray has been great about showing us the ropes as we learn about the business,” Amy says, referring to current owner Ray Williams. She adds that staff members Randy Foote and Michael Hicks will stay on after the transition so they can provide the excellent knowledge and customer relations for which they’re known.

Ray has owned the business since June 8, 2008, when he purchased it without knowing anything about wine. He was born in Pennsylvania and joined the Army when he was 17; he stayed in for seven years and met his wife of 40 years, Hanna, while stationed in Germany. After the Army he went to UNC Charlotte where he received a degree in accounting. He spent a few years in public accounting and the last 17 years of his accounting career as the controller and later, chief financial officer, of an engineering company. He was a managing partner for the last eight years there.

Of his experience at The Wine Rack he says, “I have learned a lot through the years and now have the confidence to give advice on just about any wine-related issues to my friends and customers. I’ve also met a lot of great people and developed close friendships through the business. The wine rack has become a meeting place in Southport, so much so that disappointing my customers became a point central to my strategy for selling the business.” He sold the business to locals who are also customers because he said it seemed the best way to ensure The Wine Rack “will continue to be the place where friends gather.” Ray said he and his wife love to travel and they’re focused on that for his retirement.

KJ says she’s so excited to open the new venture. “It’s really going to be both familiar and new,” she says, since she’s spent so many happy hours socializing there. “We’re excited to plan all the fun activities and events we want to see here.”

Just weeks before taking reins of the WR, KJ retired after a 42-year career as an operating room nurse, most recently working in Wilmington. KJ and her husband, Sammy, another WR loyal patron and the commodore of the Southport Yacht Club, moved to Southport in 2008 from Maryland. Their daughter and son-in-law live in Raleigh with Sammy and KJ’s beautiful granddaughter, Samantha Rose.

Amy, a North Carolina native, worked as a surgical technologist for 16 years before becoming a stay-at-home mom. Her son recently graduated college and her daughter will enter college this fall. Amy and her husband, Eric, the former commodore of the Southport Yacht Club, have been coming to Southport, where they’ve kept their boat while living in Greensboro, since 2008. Four years ago they bought a home in town and will soon relocate here full time.

Both women credit Ray with making the Wine Rack the local gathering place where people can learn from experienced and knowledgeable staff about a wide variety of wines and beers. It’s a welcome tourist attraction for people visiting Southport, as well. Amy and KJ will keep the Friday evening wine tastings and the Wine Club subscription that Ray implemented and that have grown in popularity. However, they’re also working on a full slate of additional events and activities. Stayed tuned to the Wine Rack’s Facebook page for more updates on the move:

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Wine-Rack-282560528515499/> or visit their website at <http://www.southportwinerack.com/>.