

the benefit of beads

While working full-time in Sulphur, 31-year-old Liz Bergeron operates Here and There Boutique, a jewelry business inspired by a mission trip to Kenya.

BY WILL KALEC | PHOTO BY ROMERO & ROMERO

BECAUSE SHE'S A pastor's daughter and embodies all the Pollyanna stereotypes of one, Liz Bergeron apologizes for not making her story short.

"I'm really bad at doing that," the 31-year-old explains.

Don't worry about it. The remarkable details behind the formation of an LLC built on TLC is well worth pressing pause on life to listen to.

As the CEO of Here and There Boutique, Bergeron partners with women of Kenya's Emarti village, selling their traditional, tribal-inspired items such as beaded necklaces, bracelets, headbands and even tableware like coasters stateside. Here and There has a digital storefront, but the majority of sales are done in-person at festivals and art markets throughout

Acadiana. From a booth that includes plenty of pictures taken during her handful of trips to Kenya, Bergeron echoes the company's mantra: "Everything you buy here makes a difference over there" to swarms of curious customers.



"I want them to know this isn't pretend. This is legitimate," Bergeron says. "So I love answering questions like, 'Where is the money going?' and 'Where do they get the beads?,' because the profit is going to these women. It empowers them.

We bargain. I place orders. I show them designs. We stress the importance of quality."

Bergeron's interest in Kenya piqued way before the formation of Here and There in March 2014 or even her first trip to the country six months prior. As a child, she recalls going to a "mission parade" where missionaries walked around, almost like a faux Olympic opening ceremony, carrying the flag of the countries they visited. The Kenya missionary never showed up, so Bergeron stood in, dressed in native garb.

"I don't think I knew what was going on; I was probably 8," she says. "But I remember thinking, 'This is cool. I like Kenya.' So it sounds like nothing, but that left an impression on my heart."

Fast-forward to the fall of 2013. She was depressed one day - as she says, "throwing a pity party ... And at that moment, it just

snapped, and I realized how good I have it here and that all these trivial worries and wants in my life were just that - trivial. And right then, Kenya popped up on my heart."

She called her father's friend, who organized relief trips to Africa, inquiring if a group was headed to Kenya anytime soon. Sure enough, a two-week women's-only mission was set to leave shortly through the nonprofit One Child Matters. Upon arrival, Bergeron marveled at the preponderance of women and children in the Emarti village, a common occurrence not only there but in many other areas of Kenya, as the men tend to take extensive gathering expeditions. She spent her days teaching villagers ways to conserve water and fight the spread of disease. She also took an interest in the jewelry the women crafted, partially to trade or sell, mainly for cultural reasons.

Bergeron says, "I instantly knew there was a market for this in America. So the trip ends, and I come back home, but my heart is burning - this stuff would sell, and this would provide jobs and income for a very poor community."

Through the same officials supervising the relief mission, Bergeron pitched the idea and made a small, initial purchase order. Raw materials (beads, strands, elastics, fasteners and adhesives) were provided: a 'no biggie' for Bergeron but cause for applause among the village women. As their relationship grew, Bergeron introduced the Emarti women to flashy-colored beads: highlighter shades of yellow, green, orange and pink. When she returned to pick up the order, all those beads had been swapped

for primary colors. "Guess it wasn't their thing," Bergeron says. "But as always, everything was beautiful. So whatever works. But they do want to try things, and they are open to different designs and concepts."

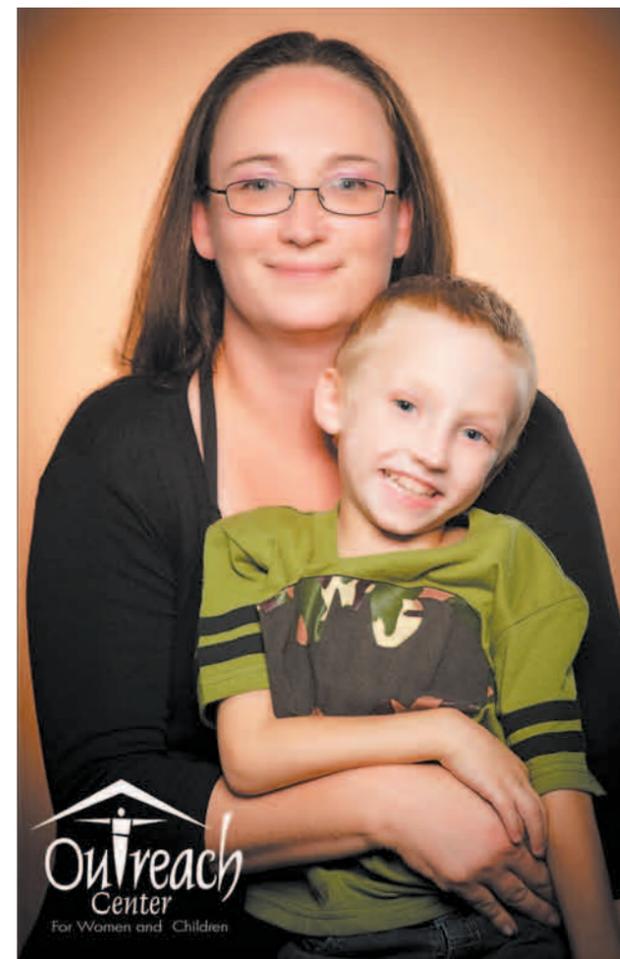
Either Bergeron or her friend, Kasey Damiata, has been back to Kenya three times to pick up the orders - a one-woman chore.

"Between a duffel bag and a suitcase, everything fits. When you go, you give away half your clothes anyway," Bergeron says. "It's commercial, but my business is hardly commercialized, if that makes any sense. These aren't orders of 6,000 bracelets or anything."

Because Bergeron pays the bills with her Monday-Friday gig as a cost supervisor at Firestone Polymers, Here and There's 2015 festival schedule isn't quite ironclad, though she'll have a presence at the Lake Charles Flea Fest (March 21-22) and Houma's Southdown Marketplace Festival in April.

"Here and There is almost like the marriage of all these dreams coming together - my heart for Kenya, my heart for the boutique and my heart for these women," Bergeron says. "It all came together, and I'd like that to keep developing in the future. I'd love to have a brick and mortar storefront, and I'd love to expand beyond Kenya. Other places need just as much help and have just as much beauty. (Here and There) could be all over the world and everything you'd buy would help the well-being and empowerment of someone somewhere." ◀

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a common link

Though a native of Washington State, Dr. Bob Carriker of UL's History Dept. has lent his culinary two cents and left a tasty mark on his adopted home.

BY WILL KALEC | PHOTO BY ROMERO & ROMERO

SO COME ON, BOB

Carriker - critic of meat-stuffed casings, creator of our latest guilty pleasure, and curator of UL's History Department - admit it: all these links are pretty much the same. If you've had one you've had them all. Pork. Rice. Some spices. Cook it up.

Boudin is boudin, right?



"NO!" he yells emphatically through a laugh, thus disturbing the Sunday morning tranquility. "No, not even close! I swear, they're all different - the way they cook the rice, whether they use long-grain or medium-grain, whether they grind the pork up or leave it in chunks, the amount of fat, whether it's dry, wet, spicy, mild. It defies logic that there could be this much variance when the core ingredients are simple, but that's what makes it unique."

Point taken.

For more than a delicious decade, Carriker has showcased that pork-infused passion to print (well, digital print, technically) as the webmaster of *boudinlink.com*, a living, always-expanding bible of boudin. Brandishing an extensive library of reviews, Carriker's quest for the perfect "snap" has taken him from Carencro to California, from super-ritzy supermarkets to one-pump gas stations on rural routes GPS struggles to find.

A bit of a spatula-wielding mad scientist, Carriker also isn't shy to chip-in his own contributions to the Cajun culinary scene. The 9-to-5 history professor created the Johnson's Boucaniere Parrain Special, a brown-bagger's dream sandwich consisting on smashed boudin balls, melted cheese and barbecue sauce. Then, this past Carnival season, Carriker unleashed his greatest delectable hybrid - the boudin king cake. Demand for the boudin-infused

sweet Mardi Gras staple far exceeded the supply Carriker could pump out on his own, so he teamed with Twins Burgers and Sweets of Lafayette to increase production.

Asked if any of his boudin mash-ups bombed or tasted terrible, Carriker pauses for a second before replying, "No, not really" - a confident retort from someone whose left an authentic fingerprint on this eclectic region despite migrating from the Pacific Northwest.

"I much prefer to be a part of what's going as opposed to an observer of what's going on," Carriker says. "That's just always been a part of who I am. Moving here, I didn't want to be on the outside looking in. I wanted to be a part of it - embrace the community completely, which was easy because the community was so open and accepting of us."

The genesis of Bob's metamorphosis into "Dr. Boudin," happened shortly after accepting a faculty position at UL in 1997. Accustomed to co-workers bringing doughnuts, bagels or cupcakes into the office on special occasions, Carriker marveled when a peer plopped down a steaming tray of boudin instead. As he embraced the Cajun custom with a full mouth, he kept his ears open (while chewing) to those around him. Local loyalty dominated the conversation. The woman from New Iberia bragged on the boudin from the shop down the street while the guy from Cecilia dismissed

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that notion, arguing the links around his neck of the woods topped every other.

Without a dog in the hunt, Carriker set out to find who (if anyone) was telling the truth.

“As a guy who was looking to learn more about where he lived, and as a guy with a soft spot for regional foods, I would go out and find those places so I could join the conversation next time,” Carriker says. “And I realized quickly that they’ve never tried the other places, so I found myself adding more to the conversation.”

“Basically all my websites start with a crazy idea and you go, ‘Oh, that should be a website,’” Carriker says. “It’s gotten to the point where I’ll invite some friends over and say I’m making Philly Cheesesteaks and they’ll joke, ‘Oh, are you making a website about those, too?’ Honestly, I didn’t know this website would have the legs its grown, and honestly I didn’t anticipate having the voice I do.”

Yeah, about that voice. To put it nicely, Carriker doesn’t mince words.

In one review, he referred the owners of an establishment as “posers.” While that seems a bit harsh, that place got off easy compared to a shop in Texas, the only place to ever get a failing grade. Their uncooked (yes, uncooked) boudin provided the awful inspiration of this line from Carriker: “OK, it is an abomination to call this boudin.” Of course, such criticism sometimes elicits a response. For instance, one shop owner whose business received a mediocre mark

from the website actually showed up to the place of employment of the guy who co-created *boudinlink.com* with Carriker.

But it’s not like Carriker is purposely looking for reasons to shred establishments like so much succulent pork. Quite the contrary. Over the years, *boudinlink.com* has handed out 15 perfect A+ grades. Thirteen of those stores reside in the unofficial boundaries of Acadiana: Rascal’s Cajun Express in Duson; Kartchner’s Grocery in Krotz Springs; Billeaud’s in Broussard; Billy’s Boudin in Opelousas; Bourque’s Super Store in Port Barre; Don’s Specialty Meats in Carencro and Scott; Cormier’s Specialty Meats in Jennings; Johnson’s Boucaniere in Lafayette; Market Basket in Lake Charles; Redlich’s City Cash in Sulphur; Sonnier’s in Lake Charles; and T-boy’s Slaughter House in Mamou.

“I’m not saying my palate is the palate, but you do get one person’s consistent analysis across the board,” Carriker says. “But trust me, critics have their own critics. I used to get a lot of, ‘Who do you think you are?’ and ‘You’re a Yankee!’ They were so funny. I took it seriously, but I never took it personally. I understood these people’s passion.”

“But when you get to review, 60, 70, 90 links of boudin, it gets harder to criticize,” Carriker continues. “When you reach those numbers, you’re not really an outsider anymore.” ◀



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face of the forecast

For decades, Lafayette TV weatherman Rob Perillo has been Acadiana's source when it comes to storms and sunshine.

BY WILL KALEC | PHOTO BY ROMERO & ROMERO

WE KNOW HIM EVEN though most of us don't know him, because we've seen him even though most of us have never actually seen him, because he's in our homes all the time, even though most of us have ever extended an invitation.

Therefore, as everyone's weatherman, Rob Perillo pushes his shopping cart down the produce aisle, today's forecast calls a partially elongated Walmart run with a 90-percent chance of recognition.

For 25 years, the affable Rob Perillo has kept Acadiana informed about weather patterns.



"Think about it," Perillo says. "I've been in living rooms throughout Acadiana for a quarter-century now. How lucky is that? That's awesome. They're complete strangers, but they're not, because we don't speak like strangers, we speak like friends. They invite me to crawfish boils. And then my wife and kids will say, 'Do you know that person?' And no, I don't."

"So it's an honor, especially in a business where there's a lot of turnover and pressure," Perillo says. "But I've gotten to be here. Every tropical storm. Every hurricane. Every meteorological event. I've been here. And for a people-person like me, it doesn't get any more special than Acadiana."

Easily one of the most trusted and second-guessed men in Cajun Country (hey, it comes with the job description, he says) Perillo has been the region's weather authority for more than a generation, working at both major Lafayette TV news stations during his tenure. As the current chief meteorologist at KATC-3, Perillo is the most decorated meteorologist in Louisiana, hauling in close to two dozen Associated Press awards, which includes distinctions for "Best Weathercast" and "Breaking Weather."

And at no other time of the year does Perillo shine as much as he does in August and September - the height of Gulf hurricane season. Leaned upon to provide accurate and up-to-date information flying in from multiple angles and sources, Perillo's disciplined pre-storm routine - which typically involves truckloads of caffeine and thimbles of sleep - ensures he's ready for whatever Mother Nature tosses his direction.

"I've done more than 100 tropical storms, so you don't remember all of them," Perillo said in June 2015. "Like this past one, Bill. I won't remember Bill. I've probably done some Bills before. But there are some you just don't forget, and for me, that first one that left a mark on me was Hurricane Andrew, because I couldn't sleep."

"I stayed up for 44 hours straight," Perillo recalls. "And I vividly recall every one of those hours."

A natural storyteller, Perillo's tales surrounding notorious storms like Rita, Katrina, Lili and Gustav are equally as entertaining, fair doses of terrifying and triumphant. In each retelling, Perillo drips heavy amounts of praise on colleague Dave Baker, the KATC engineering, reporting and production teams, as well as mentor Dick Faurot - Lafayette's Rob Perillo before Rob Perillo.



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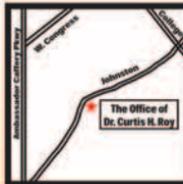
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"Dick was a weather nerd first and a broadcaster second, and I was like, 'That's what I want to be!'" Perillo recalls. "I was actually looking at old tapes a little while back, and these are from 15 to 20 years ago, and the New York accent is much more pronounced. So that's changed for sure. The energy and delivery is a little different. But one thing Faurot told me - and I try to live it to this day - is be the same person on-air as you are off-air and you'll be very successful in that business.

"And, it's worked," Perillo says. "The viewers respond to that, so when they see me in public, they see the same guy they've seen on TV. It's not a character. It's just me."

The manifestation of Perillo's love affair with the weather was really rooted in his family's move out of the Bronx and into a more suburban section of downstate New York while he was still in grade school. He nailed his initial (non-airing) forecast, correctly predicting a snow day. It was his first taste of stardom, he says tongue-in-cheek.

From there, Rob purposely attended college in an area traditionally pummeled by lake-effect snowfalls, later landing a job as an Emergency Planning Meteorologist for local nuclear power plants. Intrigued by different domestic weather phenomenon, Rob interviewed with a firm in Houston, cramming on tropical weather the entire flight down south. It worked. Perillo served as a Marine and Industrial Meteorologist for Wilkens Weather Technologies and also as an Aviation Forecaster for Air Routing International before landing on-camera in Lafayette.

What once was an 18-month contract without much of a guarantee has blossomed into a unique relationship Perillo both cherishes and takes quite seriously as the busy part of his calendar beckons.

"It's more adrenaline than anything else," Perillo says of hurricane season. "At first, it's almost youthful excitement. You're hoping it comes close enough to us so we can be involved. But 30 years later, when you have a house and a bunch of things you don't wanna lose your perspective changes.

"The rush is still there, though," Perillo says. "The information coming in and out of my realm is constant, and it just seems each storm gets crazier and crazier." ◀



To see more of Rob Perillo, tune in to KATC or visit their website at KATC.com



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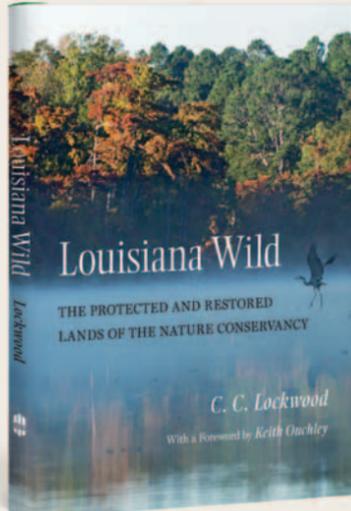
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