

Labor of Love

Local relationship counselor helps mentor couples

By JENNIFER CHAPMAN

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Studies have shown that nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. With statistics like that, it's no wonder that so many people are staying single these days.

But for Barbara Peters, marriages can endure the test of time. As a couple's counselor in Cumming, Peters is confident that with the right tools, couples can succeed in having a happy and healthy relationship.

"I feel that we need to honor marriage," said Peters. "I feel that it should be the most important relationship. I don't think that just because the divorce rate is high means that we should give up on marriage," she said.

Peters, a registered nurse and licensed professional counselor, has worked in a psychiatric hospital, managed behavioral health organizations and employee assistance consulting firms. But the New York native's passion lies in helping couples with their problems.

"I have a calling for what I do because I'm passionate about helping couples," said Peters, who recently wed in November. "I've always wanted to do this since I was a kid."

Problems, problems, problems

Each marriage—and problem within—is different, said Peters, and changes from couple to couple. Affairs, pornography, gambling problems and breaches of trust are only a few of some of the more common factors that send couples seeking Peters' advice and counsel.

"There are some cases where they're not in deep trouble, but they are in trouble and I'm here to help them," she said. "I ask my clients how their relationship was when they were dating and how it is now. People forget that you get married and you begin to grow together."

With the recent media coverage of celebrity sex scandals (think Tiger Woods, former Sen. John Edwards and South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford) there are many reasons behind infidelity and many more reasons why spouses choose to stay in the marriage.

"For some people, staying together would never work because the trust isn't there for them," said Peters. "You have to look at what caused (the infidelity). If a couple wants to stay together, that's OK, if it works for them. And if it works for them, I'm going to help them. It's really amazing when a couple tells you that they're going to stay together. It makes it all worth it," said Peters.

Ways to improve

Peters gives her clients "homework"—reading books, watching movies or behavioral and communication exercises they do at home with their partner. The exercises depend on the couple's needs.

Some couples come in way too late, teetering on the edge of divorce. And, it makes Peters' job complex as she's not only counseling one person, but two.

"Sometimes the couples want me to wave a magic wand and make everything all better right away, but I don't have one," said Peters. "It takes time and effort on behalf of a couple to make things better."

Secrets to a good marriage

When asked if she had any secrets to a good marriage, Peters said that's how the idea for her recently published book, "The Gift of a Lifetime: Building a Marriage That Lasts" came about.

"There are these ingredients that people need in a marriage—F.A.C.T.S.," she said. F.A.C.T.S. is an acronym for Forgiveness, Acceptance, Compassion, Trust and Spirituality.

"I came up with those from the troubled marriages that I encountered but I feel they need to be in every marriage," said Peters.

She said F.A.I.T.H., another acronym, adds to the F.A.C.T.S. Friendship, Affection, Intimacy, Time and Happiness.

"These are techniques that can strengthen, build, grow and keep a marriage healthy," she said.

But one of the most important factors is maintenance, said Peters.

"In the book I have a maintenance agreement that helps couples," she said.

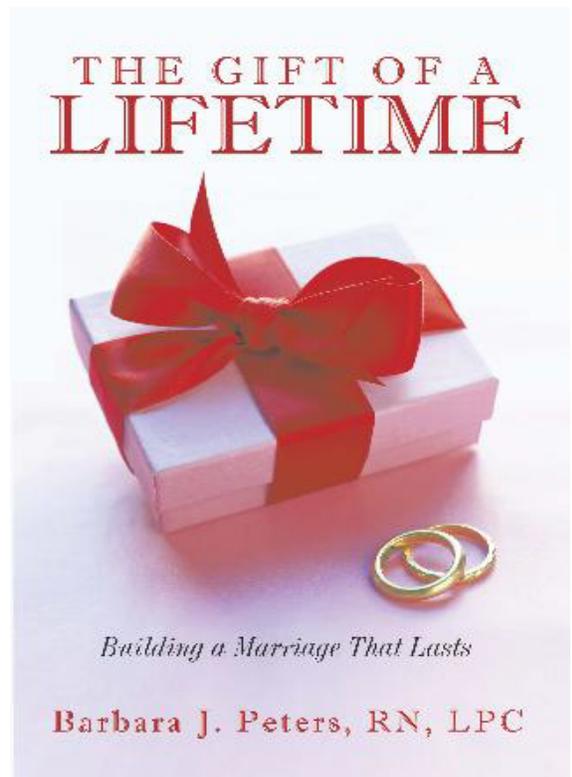
"Some couples come in to see me just for maintenance. You have to keep your marriage a priority."

What's love got to do with it?

Peters said F.A.I.T.H. helps to make love in a marriage, as it's about accepting somebody into one's life.

Peters said it's important for couples to remember their marriage vows — and renew them.

"We renew drivers' licenses, why shouldn't we renew our wedding vows?" she said. "The best advice I can give to married couples is to have them each know who they really are—not hold anything back and be willing to stand by who you are."



Peters pens 'The Gift of a Lifetime, Building a Marriage That Lasts'

By Barbara Schneider,
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Big Canoe resident Barbara Peters describes her book, "The Gift of a Lifetime, Building a Marriage That Lasts," as "the ideal guide for those contemplating marriage; those newly married; or those renewing their vows."

Her extensive professional background and years of counseling couples in trouble bring a depth of knowledge and broad experience to her writing. A registered nurse and licensed professional counselor, Peters holds a Master's degree in Counseling and is certified by the National Board of Certified Counselors and a member of Licensed Professional Counselors of Georgia.

She has hands-on experience through her work in psychiatric hospitals and behavioral health organizations. "I provide common sense, solution-focused counseling and support for individuals and couples," she said

Peters didn't set out to write a book about relationships and marriage but a letter from a client changed her mind. She had been working with the couple for a while when the husband wrote to thank her for the difference she had made in his marriage. "He thanked me and inspired me to share a message on how to make marriage work," she said.

Peters likes to use humor and common sense in counseling. She considers herself "very direct and honest" and brings

those same attributes to her book.

She believes "people form their lives by the choices they make." To help redirect those choices she came up with the acronym FACTS to encompass forgiveness, acceptance, compassion, trust and spirituality.

And she has a section called "What's love got to do with it? Two pages are devoted to wedding vows and another section offers a marriage maintenance agreement

Don't expect a dry, hard-to-read tone. Peters' easy-reading style is illustrated in this brief excerpt on cultural differences:

This one can be quite challenging. One's culture defines priorities, understanding of history, psychology, and even the language they use. Take, for example, the cultural differences between two individuals raised in different parts of the country.

Think about a southern gentleman teaming up with a New York princess. Can you get a picture of what could go on there? It could be the second Civil War. I say Civil War, but there may be nothing civil about it.

For more information about Barbara Peters' philosophy on marriage go to www.bjpcounseling.com; to purchase her book in electronic, paperback or hardcover formats go to www.thegiftofalifetime.net



Barbara Peters

Local Resident Writes about The Gift of a Lifetime



Cumming counselor and Big Canoe resident, Barbara J. Peters, RN, LPC, NCC, specializes in couples counseling and recently authored her first book, "The Gift of a Lifetime: Building a Marriage That Lasts," just released last week on Amazon.com, and soon on Barnes and Noble. com. Barbara's passion for marriage and her successes in helping troubled couples was her writing inspiration. In the "short book with a big message,"

Barbara identifies key ingredients called F.A.C.T.S., the formula for making a marital commitment last a lifetime. She adds 'F.A.I.T.H.' to the mix creating a solid plan for a successful marriage. F.A.C.T.S. and F.A.I.T.H. are concepts never before explored by other marriage experts. While "The Gift of a Lifetime" is informational, it's also a gift—for those embarking on marriage, newlyweds or couples who have been married a while who want to renew the spark in their union. Barbara is a member of the local community who loves helping others. For more information, please visit www.bjpcounseling.com.

Marriage Maintenance

Giving Your Lifelong Commitment a Tune-up

by Vivian Heard

When was the last time you performed a little maintenance on your marriage? Once many couples say "I do" and return home from the honeymoon, they kick back and put their marriages on autopilot. Then when they hit those bumps in the road, they wonder why their unions are on shaky ground.

After almost 18 years of marriage, I found a treasure trove of valuable information and tangible tips that I could easily apply to my own marriage in the book *The Gift of a Lifetime: Building a Marriage That Lasts* by Forsyth County Counselor Barbara Peters, RN, LPC, NCC, released in December 2009. The inspiring quotations found in the book set the tone for a positive exercise in marriage maintenance.

Marriage maintenance really isn't any different from anything that needs routine attention. It's pretty logical, really. If you take care of something, it's apt to last a lot longer.

Peters introduces her formula for building, growing and keeping a marriage healthy and long-lasting. She calls it F.A.C.T.S., a powerful acronym that can strengthen a marriage: F is for Forgiveness, A is for Acceptance, C is for Compassion, T is for Trust and S is for Spirituality.

"Because of my passion for marriage, my own experiences and my background in counseling married couples, I felt compelled to write this book in hopes of reaffirming the institution and helping couples strengthen their marital bond," explained Peters.

According to Peters, marriage is a psychological journey that begins with attraction, travels through a course of self-discovery, and culminates in a satisfying lifelong union. It is forever changing as we are in constant growth while we travel life's fluid path. "Marriage is not about finding the perfect mate, but about working on yourself to become the perfect mate for the spouse you have chosen," she advised.

The book is meant for engaged couples, newlyweds, couples in love, couples in trouble, couples renewing their vows — anyone committed to taking a marriage well beyond the words "I do."

Peters practices what she preaches, successfully using formulas and tips described in the book with her own clients. If I can save a relationship on any given day, then I know my work is done."