

PEGGY AND JOHN PETREY CARVE A NEW SECOND-CAREER PATH  
AND PROVIDE DEPTH TO THE ART MOVEMENT IN CHATTANOOGA.

# On The Corner. of East Main & Jefferson

Story by Deborah Petticord  
Photography courtesy of Petrey Studio and Deborah Petticord

**I**N RECENT YEARS, Chattanooga has attracted the attention of many new artists who have moved into town and have collectively reclaimed entire neighborhoods for their living and working spaces.

Some are even second-career couples embarking on new life journeys. Peggy and John Petrey moved from Florida to be away from the dense population and rising cost of living.

The couple first looked at relocating in San Diego, since John grew up in California, it seemed like home. But finding affordable studio space in a state with just as many problems as the one they were leaving wasn't in the cards. They were drawn to Santa Fe, New Mexico, home to hundreds of artists. There they found a beautiful nine-acre property in a development in the basin where Peggy says "there were lots of other artists." However, the developer insisted on a six-month build out deadline. With their workloads and John's parents to relocate, the timeline was impossible. They tried Asheville, North Carolina—a smaller market and an artists' haven, although its clean mountain air and heavenly retirement image made for high-dollar commercial property.

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Peggy and John Petrey share a laugh in their colorful, artful home and studio on East Main Street.



## History Continues.

—Peggy Petrey



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John's series of dress sculptures has been popular—both around town, where a stylish copper-clad number may be seen on Main Street, and in various collections around the country. He has just finished one he dedicated to Lucille Ball that is a recognizable tribute to the wardrobe she wore in "I Love Lucy."



"Carmen" by John Petrey has an aluminum bodice and a vacuum-formed plasticware skirt.

Materials for the sculptures are organized and stored in boxes on tall shelves until needed, alongside the camera equipment. Petrey just finished a \$28,000 bottle-cap evening gown that is ready for shipment to a collector in St. Louis. "It was a killer," he says of the art that required repetitive hand movements, holding a heavy battery-powered screwdriver. The piece may also be part of an exhibit on fashion at the Racine Museum in 2011.

"I look at materials differently than everybody else," says Petrey. "I want to take rigid materials and make them flow like fabric." John, who grew up in the 60s, was the only child of working parents. "I watched a lot of TV—shows like 'Leave it to Beaver' and 'The Andy Griffith Show' where everything was almost perfect and every problem was solved in 30 minutes," he says. "I get a lot of visual cues from that time." His sculptures are often based on toys and clothing. He believes most people find his work somewhat nostalgic and he wonders what memories people will favor from 2010.

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John has done lectures for Baylor students for the past two years where he discusses thinking creatively. "I always tell them to look around them and see what they like. It's okay if what you [respond to] is different."

**"I look at materials differently than everybody else. I want to take rigid materials and make them flow like fabric."**

—John Petrey



"Blue Boy Pull Toy #1" is currently on display at the Chattanooga Theatre Centre.

He is beginning a new series of large-scale pull toys, inspired by childhood. The first of these—a blue rhinoceros, is on display in front of the Chattanooga Theatre Centre as part a new public art walking tour and exhibit for the summer. Tourists and hometown people alike will enjoy the tour, which may serve as a likely attraction for visitors.

Petrey says, "We need the element of art tourism in our city."



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