

## Artist Spotlight: Jim Leahy

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Leaving behind a successful art installation company in California, Jim Leahy and his wife, Vikki, moved back to the East Coast to live closer to family and began the search for a place to call home. At first, they were not sure where home should be. They somehow, like many others, discovered an enticing little community called Richmond Hill. Finding that small town feeling, great weather and that coastal magic so mesmerizing—especially to an artist—they decided to stay.

While becoming disengaged from the business in California, Jim first began framing art out of his garage at home. Soon, however, he moved to a storefront in Ford Plaza.

When he is not working, Jim enjoys painting subject matter from his coastal surroundings: the marshes, creeks and landmarks that captured his interests in the first place. As fate would have it, the community began to draw Jim in as he began to learn about the lives of his clients. He saw their history while framing their artwork. He learned the connections between their stories and the landmarks he had been putting on canvas.



**While framing an antique baby dress, Jim got to know the generations of children (babies and their parents) who wore the same 1909 vintage Christening gown of their ancestor. As he combed the local area and painted the images he found interesting, he began to strike a nerve in the hearts of the people who live here. From one customer, Jim learned the painting of a little country store nestled under some oaks (Mitchell’s store, which is no longer standing) was a place the customer remembered playing as a child—pulling milk cartons through the dirt and “playing boats.” Another client, upon seeing this painting said, “That is Barefoot Betty’s.” It’s the place where many of the locals recall grabbing a fresh egg salad sandwich and a bottled coke.**

**Shrimp boats at the Fishermans’ Co-op, shady spots on Sterling Creek, hidden cutthroughs on the Ogeechee, Bryan Neck Presbyterian Church: these are all subjects that have caught Jim’s artistic eye. Captured by the beauty of the imagery alone, Jim was fascinated when people came in his gallery and laid claim to what they saw.**

**They named the boats that family members had owned or worked on. They identified paintings as their favorite fishing spots. They recalled how they swam, played or just lived part of their lives in those images. They remembered.**



**Preserving the history and the culture of the area through his art has become a special part of what Jim enjoys about painting. As a small town framer, he feels profoundly linked to the history of the area. He has framed not only the treasures and heirlooms of local families, but historical documents, deeds and artifacts for the local museums, such as the Richmond Hill Historical Museum, Fort Stewart Museum, The Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum and the Fort McAllister Museum.**

**“Picture framing in California was definitely not as personal. You generally would not know, much less be friends with the customers. You wouldn’t get the history of the item being framed, the lives it has touched and the lives it is going to touch.” In 2002, Jim opened Leahy Art Gallery in Richmond Hill where he displays and sells his artwork as well as that of other artists in the area. His connection to the community is personal, whether he is framing and preserving pieces for clients, producing his own art or even mentoring new talent. Jim has gained a love and appreciation for Richmond Hill.**

**Jim Leahy definitely gets it!**

**Artists are captivated by the beauty of the Coastal south, and Richmond Hill suffers no shortage of what inspires and motivates**

**the creative energy of those with talent. A surprising number of artists reside in Richmond Hill. This series highlights our local artists so that you can get to know and recognize their work. We hope you enjoy!**

<http://www.richmondhillreflections.com/2011/04/artist-spotlight-jim-leahy>