



*For the Love of His Community*  
Up Close & Personal With Steve Tilton

*Written by Lisa Carroll Photography by Donna Huffman*

One of the quiet heroes making a difference in our community has to be Lowcountry native, Steve Tilton. His love of people from all walks of life is a natural gift and has served him well as a community leader, a business leader, a family man and a friend to many.

As a young boy, Steve grew up in the Lowcountry in the 1960's. After college (Georgia Tech), Steve's calling was to come back to his beloved Lowcountry and work in the family business. That family business was new home construction and Steve soon established his own company in 1994, Tilton Group Signature Homes. Today, under his leadership, the company has built more than 150 custom homes in many fine communities, including Spring Island, Palmetto Bluff, Callawassie Island and Oldfield. The company recently garnered six Lighthouse Awards for excellence in home building through the Hilton Head Homebuilders Association. Tilton currently serves as president of the Rotary Club of Bluffton, he is a board member for Hilton Head Regional Healthcare and he has supported the efforts of the March of Dimes for many years. What will impact you the most about Steve Tilton's journey in life are the people he passionately cares for and his desire to make our community a better place.

**Bluffton Breeze:** Where did you grow up?

**Steve Tilton:** I grew up on Hilton Head Island at North Forest Beach. I was in the first class at Sea Pines Montessori, and then I went to Sea Pines Academy. I graduated

from Benedictine Military School in Savannah in 1982. The other day I was reminiscing with friends about our Catholic schooling and the discipline involved in our military education. I have to admit that both had a tremendous impact on the person I am today.

**BB:** Any fond memories of being a lowcountry boy back in the 60's and 70's?

**ST:** When I grew up, Hilton Head was just a small, sleepy town of 2,500 people, maybe even less. It was busy a little bit in the summer, but as I tell my children, I was a country boy. I remember when they painted the hash marks on North Forest Beach Drive. Having grown up in the country, my brother and I thought that was where you were supposed to walk. We walked down the middle of the street every day until Mrs. Lemon came up on us one day in her car. She asked us what we were doing. Our reply was, "Mrs. Lemon, you're not supposed to drive here! This is the sidewalk." That was probably the only car that drove down North Forest Beach back then.

Our back yard was the beach and as kids we used to dig tunnels and hold off enemy invasions on the beach. It was an extraordinary place to grow up as a Tom Sawyer kid. Going to oyster roasts was a regular event. I remember one thing I hated about getting out on the river with my dad. He would always have me and my brother, Chris, push the boat along the banks of the creeks and rivers while he threw

the cast net. Once, dad stepped on a stingray and the barb went into his leg. That pretty much ended our days of having to push the boat down the river. Thankfully, electric motors started coming out about then.

Another fond memory for me was walking down to Capin's Pharmacy on Saturdays because that's when the new supply of comic books would come in. We would lie around the floor near the comic book rack. Poor Mr. Capin never ran us off. People would just step over us!

BB: What do you love about this area?

ST: I have to say the water. I've been to a lot of beautiful places, and when I come back it's always the smell of the salt marsh that strikes me, first. I love the smell of pluff mud. I think it's in my blood. This is home.

BB: You've seen tremendous change. What impacts you the most about this area?

ST: I think what impacts me is the diversity of the people that are here now. I meet people from all walks of life every day, some affluent, well educated, others just getting here to make a living. There are people here from all over the country and the world. That is a huge change from the 2,500, mostly southern people that lived here when I was growing up.



BB: What is important to you?

ST: Family is first and foremost. My work is very important to me. I love what I'm doing and I love interacting with people and my community is important to me.

BB: You're a newlywed?

ST: Yes, at 43 I am a newlywed. Maureen and I recently married at Palmetto Bluff with our family present. I met her when I was on the state board of the March of Dimes. I have a stepson, Tom (8 yrs. old), and two daughters, Meg (12) and Bridget (15). We're a busy, blended family. One of the things I emphasize to our children is commitment to the community. I like the kids to come to Rotary and other charitable events to help out as volunteers. I think it's important to encourage and stress to our younger generation to get involved.

BB: Serving your community is a passion. Why did you choose Rotary?

ST: Blount Shepard invited me 18 years ago to this group I kind of got absorbed into it. At the time we had 22 members. It was hard work back in those days, but we had fun. I have been a Rotarian ever since and I am the current president of the club.

BB: Why did you get involved with the hospital?

ST: I remember as a kid not having a hospital on Hilton Head. I don't think there was a hospital until I was about 12 years of age. And, there was certainly no hospital in Bluffton. I thought it was important for Bluffton to have a hospital as this area began to rapidly grow. I am proud to serve on the board. It has been a very interesting experience for me, not having been involved in medical credentialing and the governances of a hospital. It's an eye opener just to see what it takes to run a hospital. I am very pleased now to be involved with Tenet on behalf of our community.

BB: What else civically are you doing?

ST: I am the incoming Secretary and Treasurer for our local homebuilders association. I have traveled to Washington D.C.

along with other HBA membersto lobby for improvements in building standards for our area and for our country. Also, I am attending meetings for the development of a future community foundation to serve the needs of Bluffton. I am very excited about this forward thinking. And, I fully support the March of Dimes efforts.

BB: Do you tie all these principles into how you build a home?

ST: I think it goes back to what is most important to me, the people that I build for. They come to me for one reason, to build the highest quality house, and I don't want to let them down. I think that's what sets us apart. When you wake up every morning and say, "I don't want to let Mr. and Mrs. Jones down," obviously you are going to strike up a relationship with these folks.

BB: You recently won six Lighthouse Awards for building. What do these awards mean to you and your staff?

ST: It means we are fully recognized as a high quality, lowcountry builder and that the southern vernacular style of building has become more widely appreciated. Our clients ask for quality over quantity and they want nice amenities, details in their dream home. We provide that seamlessly and our staff backs it up with the highest level of professionalism.

BB: Relationship building seems to be a strength of yours?

ST: Yes, even with clients that I have worked for in the past. It's not uncommon for former clients to end up working with me. Often, they share an interest about the process of building, the details we cover, and want to be a part of it. At the end of the day, if we talk about what drives me, I want that client that I met a year ago to become a friend. Someone I can share the lowcountry life with and have a few laughs with. Someone that I know will be a good ambassador for my company for years to come and more importantly a new friend that I've come to know.

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