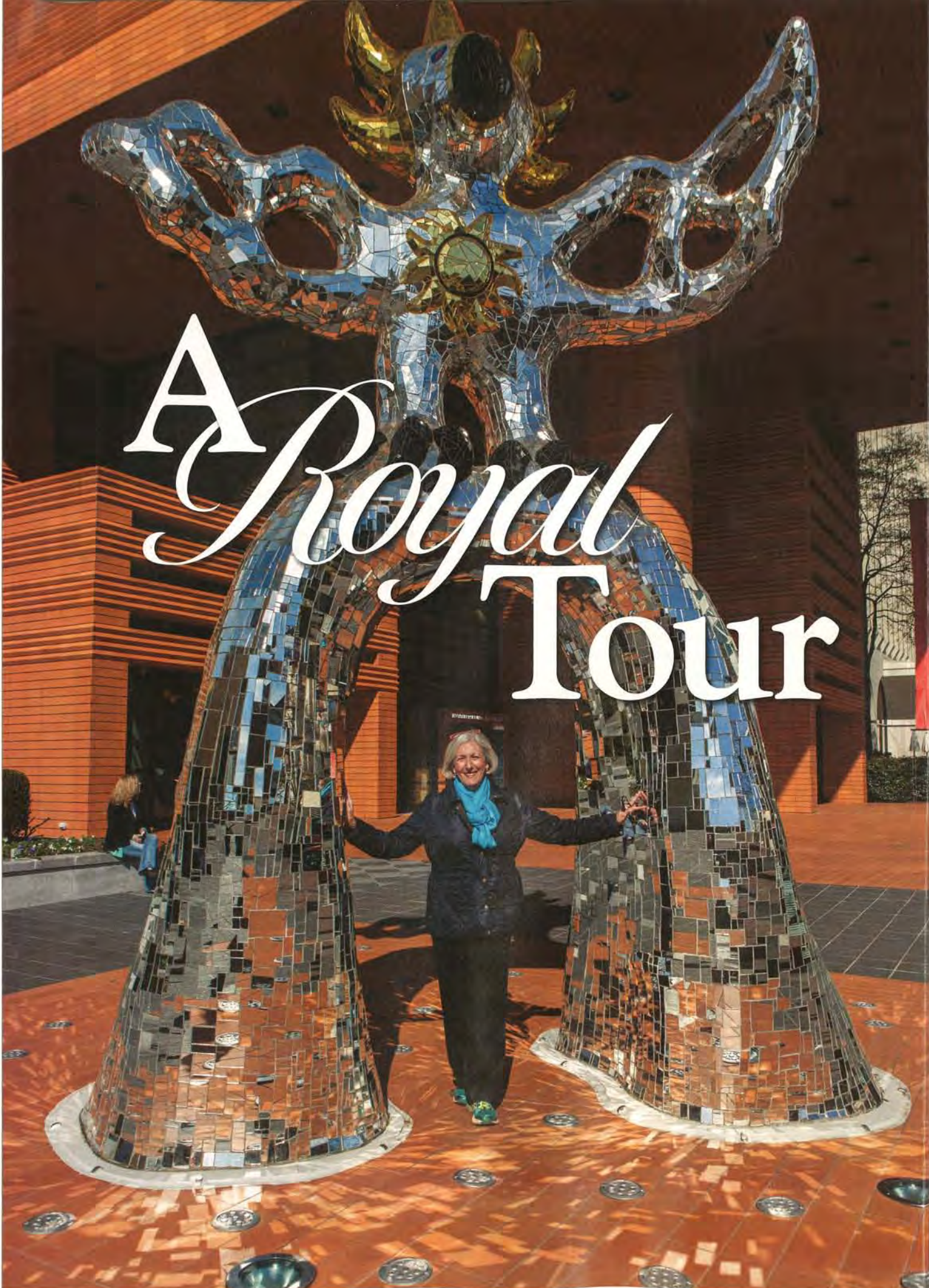
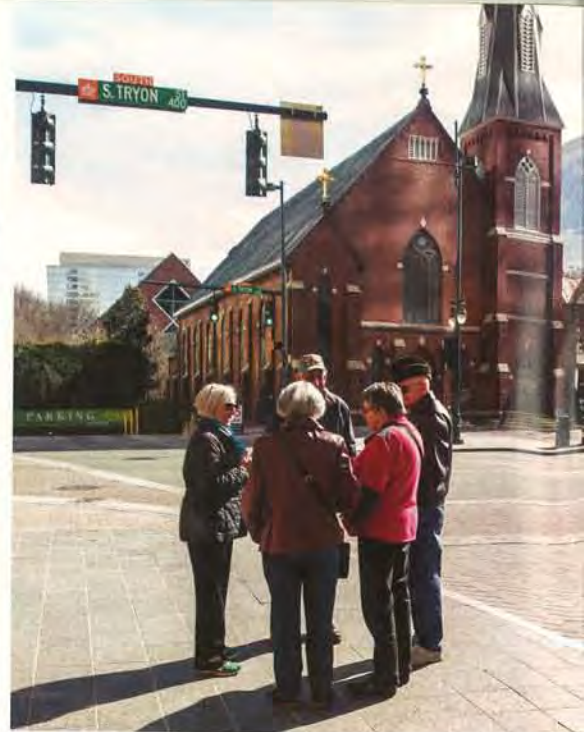


A Royal Tour





Genie Hufham Introduces Newcomers & Natives To The Queen City

For those who have just arrived in Charlotte — whether for a weekend tour or a longer stay — Queen City native Genie Hufham is an important presence. Her smiling face is often one of the first they encounter when they get to town. Since 2009, Hufham has owned Charlotte Crown Guides, where she provides step-on bus and walking tours of the city, as well as training for hotel personnel on how to help guests maximize their time in town. As she

works, Hufham is doing what she does best: sharing her genuine enthusiasm for all that Charlotte has to offer.

Queen Of The City

Hufham's clientele runs the gamut, from busloads of tourists to spouses of business professionals who are looking for an entertaining way to spend an afternoon while their better halves are occupied. But no matter whom she's greeting that day, Hufham focuses her attention carefully to ensure that her group leaves with a positive, lasting impression of Charlotte.

Though Hufham has been providing her guide services for several years professionally, she's been an unofficial ambassador for the city for much longer. She began volunteering at the city's Visitor Info Center in the late 1990s.

Hufham reflects on the beginnings of her career.

"People would ask if there was a city tour," she says. "I'd say, 'No,' and hang my head, embarrassed. I continued volunteering and learning more about the city. I would drive around, because with everything changing, there were



"Charlotte is that 'New South' city. People say two things: 'It's so clean here, and the people are so friendly.' That's what I want to perpetuate."
— Gente Hufham

new roads being put in and new buildings popping up. We soon became the hot spot to come move to. In 1999, I was approached by a woman to do some tours, and I said, 'Oh! How perfect!'

In 2009, Hufham and her then-business partner Mary Schultz decided to create Charlotte Crown Guides. Though Schultz has since stepped away from the business, the two are still close and the company continues to flourish.

Hufham suggests visitors to Charlotte looking for an overall feel for the Queen City should take a tour ... and quite possibly, not hers!

"The first thing I would say is take

a city tour, and it's actually not going to be mine," Hufham says. "I don't drive and talk. I know better. There are companies that do that, though. Then, if you'd like to spend a day in uptown, use the self-guided walking tour that is online on the Charlotte's Got a Lot website."

Hufham has plenty of suggestions for those who want to explore the city alone, without a professional guide.

"Go into Fourth Ward and go into some of the big buildings," she suggests. "Look at the art inside. If you're interested in history, go to the Levine Museum of the New South. You've got to see all the public art

here, too. The Arts and Science Council has a wonderful public art walking brochure, and it's even a podcast! Then you have the Gantt Center for African-American Arts and Culture, the Mint Museum, and the Bechtler Museum."

The uptown sightseeing doesn't end there. Hufham encourages visitors to take a peek at beautiful Romare Bearden Park during the day, and at night, take in a show at the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, the Knight Theater, or the Actor's Theatre. And don't forget the fabulous restaurants!

On the other hand, if you have lived in Charlotte for many years,



Hufham has a prescription to cure Queen City boredom. She suggests getting outside and exploring the outskirts of the city.

“Go find Reedy Creek Park,” she says. “Go find one of the 37 miles of greenways that we have throughout the city. Go experience a different section of town that you’ve never visited. Be a tourist in your own town.”

Hufham says that all transplants to Charlotte need to do one thing — whether they like it or not.

“Get lost,” she says, with a laugh. “It’s better if you get lost with a new neighbor behind the wheel so you can look out and figure out where you’re going!”

She suggests getting involved with some of Charlotte’s fabulous programs, such as the Levine Museum for the New South’s “New South for the New Southerner.” She also suggests that newcomers should consider volunteering.

“Go online and search for volunteer opportunities,” she says. “When you volunteer, you’re out of your comfort zone, and you have an opportunity to meet new people.”

Hufham takes a second to consider the Queen City’s next five to 10 years of expected growth.

“As we change our complexion tremendously, there are going to be many more opportunities for people to get out of their shell,” she says. “We’re attracting many more businesses. Charlotte is that ‘New South’ city. People say two things: ‘It’s so clean here, and the people are so friendly.’ That’s what I want to perpetuate.”

Most importantly, Hufham says you don’t have to be a native of Charlotte to be considered a Charlottean.

“There are many people who move here because their jobs got relocated, but now they’re here and they wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. There’s a phrase that I’ve heard people say that goes, ‘I may not be a Charlotte native, but I got here as soon as I could.’”

ToLearnMore

Visit Charlottecrownguides.com. [TCW]



Originally from Syracuse, Lauren Levine was shocked to learn that some places don’t have snow nearly year-round, and she won’t be leaving Charlotte any time soon.

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