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Young couple enjoys living in Natchez

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NATCHEZ — With school out and summer here, April McDonnell has plenty of free time for the next few months.

April, a third-grade math and science teacher at McLaurin Elementary School, just completed her third year teaching children in Natchez. A graduate of Delta State University, she and her husband, Derrick, moved to Natchez when Derrick got a job as a pilot for local business owner David Paradise.

When The Dart landed at the McDonnell residence at 230 Holly Drive, April was keeping track of when her husband's flight would return from a business trip last Thursday evening.



Photo by Cain Madden

Derrick and April McDonnell of Natchez get their feet wet in St. Catherine Creek. The couple has lived in Natchez for three years and enjoys the area outdoor activities.

Whether it's riding bikes along the Natchez Trace, or walking the dog at the mounds at the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, the couple enjoys spending time outside.

“He’s really quiet and shy until he gets to know you. He’s the opposite of me,” April said.

In addition, April said she and her husband like to do a lot of traveling during the summer months. With the two of them wanting to have a child in the near future, April said now is as good a time as any to see the world.

“There’s not really a lot of people our age here, so we travel a lot in the summer. This is a good place for us to start out, though. It’s easy living, and it’s not too expensive,” April said.

“We’ll go to places like (Las) Vegas, Los Angeles... places I’ve never seen before. I want to do that before I have kids. I’m 27, so I’m at the age where I need to start having kids.”

April said she enjoys teaching, but would like to branch out and maybe get another degree.

“I just finished two courses at Co-Lin on health and recreation and physical education. I’m looking at maybe doing something at either a doctor’s office or even a dentist’s office. Any way to better someone’s life by telling them, ‘This is how you take care of teeth,’ or, ‘You have to eat your vegetables,’” April said.

“I love the social atmosphere of teaching, working with people and listening to people. As a teacher, though, I think that, unless you’re tutoring someone, you’re not getting a lot of one-on-one time where you can sit down and talk about how you’re doing and how we can make you better.”

But thanks to the principal at McLaurin, Alice Morrison, April said she also enjoys the job she currently has.

“(Morrison) has been amazing since day one. When my husband got his job here three years ago, I was looking around at the school, and I introduced myself to her,” she said.

“When I told her I was looking for a job, she just struck up a conversation and started asking questions. When we were done talking, she told me she really wanted me, and asked if I could do an interview the next day.”

But that story doesn’t compare to how April met her husband.

“While at Delta State, I coached gymnastics and he coached swimming. We were both working at the YMCA there at the time. One day I was with my friend Heather, and I pointed him out and said, ‘He’s going to be the man I’m going to marry,’” April said.

But nothing came of the proclamation for a month and a half. Then, April said she finally got the courage to say something to him.

“I asked him, ‘Do you go to Delta State?’ He said yes, and turned back around and said nothing,” April said.

Three days later, though, Derrick called her, and they stayed on the phone between eight and nine hours, April said.

“We’ve been married four years, and have been together seven years. To this day, Heather still asks me how I called that,” she said.

Although he didn’t talk much before they got married, April said he’s gotten more talkative since they’ve been together.

“Now he talks all the time. We like all the same things, and now we’re inseparable,” April said.

“His mom and dad say that both being with me and working as a pilot has opened him up.”