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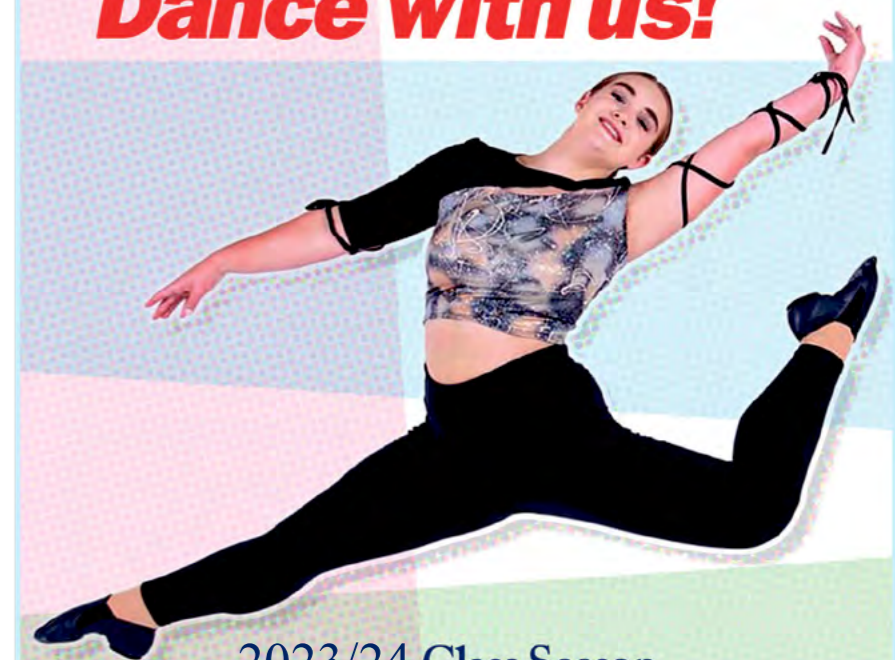
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DIVERSIONS

Growing Pains: The Changing Landscape of Richmond

by FAYERUZ REGAN

MY FAMILY QUESTIONED my desire to move to Richmond in the mid-nineties. “Are you sure?” they asked through wide eyes. “There’s a lot of crime there.” This was coming from people who lived in the DC area; the nation’s “murder capital” in 1992. The surrounding years weren’t great either.

The move was a pragmatic decision. I was rejected from NYU so I opted to stay in-state for college, since I’d be paying for it. VCU had an urban campus – which I needed. One drive through the Fan District, and I was in love. We drove down Grove Avenue admiring the historic row houses. Front porches were spotted with young men wearing baseball caps and khaki shorts that said “preppy,” but barefoot and drinking Sam Adams, which said, “also fun.” Dave Matthews wafted through the air as if piped in via hidden speakers.

I loved the walkability, the architecture, the neighborhood diners with ornate tin ceilings, wooden booths and that stale beer smell. We rode our bikes to the Byrd Theatre. On sweltering days, we’d drag kiddie pools onto our balconies. On cold days, we huddled at Bogart’s (RIP) for burgers and gossip.

This isn’t to say my parents were wrong about the crime. Shots rang out at night. Where upscale brunch spots line Broad Street, there were once prostitutes. My friends and I would drive past slowly, ogling them. We traveled in packs to buy groceries at the now-closed Farmer John’s, where even the parking lot was treacherous. The stretch of Broad Street that ran alongside the campus consisted of abandoned buildings; massive, dark structures that hid secrets.

I moved to Los Angeles after graduation and stayed for well over a decade. But whenever I flew home, I’d beg my parents for the car keys. I promised it would only be a quick jaunt to Richmond. Then I hit my



Fayeruz (far left) still frequents Havana 59, one of her favorite college haunts from the 1990s.

thirties, the financially exorbitant decade of weddings. Every time my husband and I attended nuptials, there would be something new to marvel at. The Siegel Center! Crime is down! Broad Street revitalization! Jackson Ward as an arts district?

Blame it on L.A. housing costs, or the fact that we had just seen *A Prairie Home Companion* live at the Hollywood Bowl. At the event, the fantasy of a simple life hung in the air for everyone attending – many of whom came from small towns. But Richmond was starting to grow on my husband. After a lunch at O’Toole’s followed by a dip with friends at Texas Beach, he turned to me in the James and asked, “Why don’t we live here?”

By the time we arrived, Richmond pride hit fever pitch. RVA stickers were on all the cars. No one could even be bothered to hate NoVA anymore—we were too cool to care. What I didn’t notice is that we were part of a new influx of outsiders coming in. Waves of new arrivals were flowing in from San Francisco, Austin, and most notably, NoVA. Between 2020-2023, Richmond welcomed over 40,000 new residents.

I know many aren’t pleased. Like me, they love the big city culture without the big city problems, like traffic and skyrocketing housing costs. I left L.A. for balance. I was burnt

out from saying “yes” to everything, since the whiff of possibility was everywhere. It was electric, exhausting. I assumed Richmond would give me the simple life I was longing for. The hard-earned lesson here? We all create the lives we want. My ambition, job choices, and desire to start a family kept the treadmill on high. To quote Taylor Swift, “I’m the problem, it’s me.”

My question is, can Richmond currently handle the influx? The local government is barely holding it together. You’ll wait a minimum of two hours if you call the DPU. Potholes grow so neglected, people defiantly convert them into art installations. With vertical apartment buildings filling the sky along Arthur Ashe, they decided it would be a good idea to knock nearby Brook Road down to one lane, for bicycles.

Luckily, I sometimes catch glimpses of small-town life. A wave to friends through restaurant windows. My next door neighbors read North of the James and made an off-color joke about my piece on Onancock, simply by removing the “n” in the middle of that word. We had a good laugh and I thought, neighbors talking with me about my column in a local magazine? That’s something that would’ve happened in Lake Wobegone. It was my own little *Prairie Home Companion* moment. **N**

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Richmond Community Hospital: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

by JACK R JOHNSON



Richmond Community Hospital

THE GOOD

IN THE UNITED STATES, Black lives and the medical profession have always had a fraught relationship. During the ante-bellum period, the assumption among many in the White medical establishment was that Blacks had higher rates of disease and death because of some supposed 'racial inferiority.' Not, for example, that they lacked decent medical facilities, decent nutrition or decent income to pay for medical treatment. In 1906, W.E.B Du Bois addressed this issue, publishing one of the earliest descriptions of health disparities between Blacks and Whites pointing out that the disparities were largely matters of environmental and economic conditions—sanitation, education, and economics—rather than racial traits.

The health care field did not become more equal, however. After the Civil War, the vast majority of

hospitals created were for Whites only, or were segregated. The medical conditions for Black patients was abysmal compared to those for White patients. In fact, in the early twentieth century, few Southern hospitals even admitted African-American patients. Many White physicians refused to see them at their offices, and those who did, enforced Jim Crow segregation, often forcing African-Americans to wait in separate rooms or to enter through separate doors. Frequently Black patients were relegated to segregated areas of a hospital, like an attic, or the basement, or a supply room, if they were allowed in at all. To get decent healthcare, Blacks soon realized they needed to build their own facilities.

The Freedman's Bureau in Washington, D.C. was one of the first all Black hospitals designed to address this disparity. They were charged with providing much needed medical care to slaves freed following the Civil War. The hospital was

located on the grounds belonging to Howard University and was the only federally-funded health care facility for African-Americans in the nation.

Later, in the segregated South, one of the first Black hospitals, created in the early 1900s, was the Richmond Community Hospital in Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Sarah Garland Jones, one of the first Black women licensed to practice medicine in the Commonwealth of Virginia, came together with a group of Black physicians to create Richmond's first Black-owned hospital which opened its doors in Jackson Ward in 1907. In addition to being a hospital where Black doctors could treat Black patients, it also became a teaching hospital for Black nurses when at the time the options were few to none.

The hospital moved to Overbrook Road behind Virginia Union University in the 1930s. It moved again in 1980, with the help of 21 Black physicians who used their

own personal capital to relocate the hospital to its current location on North 28th Street. According to Bon Secours which now owns Richmond Community hospital, "by re-establishing Richmond Community Hospital in the East End, these physicians wanted to ensure the members of their community had a designated hospital to go to where they knew they would be treated with dignity and respect."

THE BAD

The shuttered hospital building at Overbrook Road is now slated for demolition. For those who want to honor the history of the institution this is at best a mistake, at worst, a travesty. According to the Richmond Free Press, "Virginia Union University, a historically Black university which owns the former hospital at Overbrook, plans to demolish the historic building and replace it with... a \$42 million housing project created through a partnership between VUU and

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the New York-based company The Steinbridge Group.”

The project is part of Steinbridge’s efforts to help historically Black colleges and universities, and other minority-focused groups, transform underused resources into economic assets. However, former Virginia Delegate Viola Baskerville and others who oppose the demolition, believe that VUU and other HBCUs should not have to destroy the history of a community to attain economic success.

The empty hospital at Overbrook was the focus of a rally on March 3.

“There’s no denying that our city is facing a historic housing crisis, and we need to find innovative ways to increase our stock of accessible [living] units,” First District Councilman Andreas Addison said. “We must also remember that at the root of this crisis is Black displacement, redlining, and the legacy of systemic racism that for too long informed our city’s approach to growth. We cannot repair the sins of our racist past if that means destroying monuments to Richmond’s Black history in the process.”

THE UGLY

To be clear, the Richmond Community Hospital did not stop its service after the historic Overbrook location shuttered its doors. The hospital on North 28th Street was acquired by Bon Secours in 1995 to ensure the facility’s survival as an anchor institution in Richmond’s East End. However, it was always hobbled by a lack of resources that only became worse in the 1990s and 2000s, but not because it didn’t generate sufficient revenue. In fact—here’s the ugly part—according to a 2022 New York Times article, “[T]he hollowed-out hospital — owned by Bon Secours Mercy Health, one of the largest nonprofit health care chains in the country — has the highest profit margins of any hospital in Virginia, generating as much as \$100 million a year, according to the hospital’s financial data.”

How is that possible? According to

the 2022 New York Times article, “The secret to its success lies with a federal program that allows clinics in impoverished neighborhoods to buy prescription drugs at steep discounts, charge insurers full price and pocket the difference. The vast majority of Richmond Community’s profits come from the program, said two former executives who were familiar with the hospital’s finances and requested anonymity because they still work in the health care industry.”

“The Federal program known as 340B after the section of the federal law that authorized it allows hospitals to buy drugs from manufacturers at a discount — roughly half the average sales price. The hospitals are then allowed to charge patients’ insurers a much higher price for the same drugs.” But here’s the rub, hospitals did not have to disclose how much money they made from sales of the discounted drugs. And they are not required “to use the revenues to help the underserved patients who qualified them for the program in the first place.”

According to the Times, “Richmond Community has the feel of an urgent-care clinic, with a small waiting room and a tan brick facade. The contrast with Bon Secours’s nearby hospitals [in the wealthier area] is striking.”

Dr. Lucas English, who worked in Richmond Community’s emergency department until 2018 was quoted in the New York Times saying, “Bon Secours was basically laundering money through this poor hospital to its wealthy outposts. It was all about profits.”

Six months ago, a U.S. Senate committee demanded answers from Bon Secours on the use of its discount drug program, 340B, following accusations of the program’s misuse.

Meanwhile, despite the protest of local citizens, the old building for the historic Community Hospital in Richmond is slated for demolition.



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Bob Kocher Once Upon a Time

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN, originally printed in 2005

This cover story about Bob Kocher was originally published in NORTH of JAMES magazine in May of 2005, a little over a year after he opened Once Upon a Vine, the city's premier wine and beer shop.

ONCE UPON A TIME, well before Once Upon A Vine was even a seed of an idea, Bob Kocher grew up in Baltimore, and on many warm evenings he would wander over to 33rd Street and take a seat in the bleachers at Memorial Stadium to watch his home team, the Orioles, these boys of summer, round an eternity of bases, their hopeful eyes trained on a distant pennant.

"I used to eat, sleep and drink baseball," he tells me. He played sandlot ball as a kid and in high school played for the Orioles farm team. It was just for two months, but Bob got a chance to play in Charleston, Syracuse, Toledo. He was a competent hitter, could spray a ball anywhere, infield or outfield, and his team manager, Earl Weaver, who would later take the Orioles to the World Series, thought Bob had a real talent for the game.

But Bob's father thought differently. "My father wouldn't let me play any more," says Bob. "He said there were too many older guys running around chasing



Father and son Bob and Bob Kocher of Once Upon a Vine.

women and drinking and stuff and he said I was loosing my youth."

Earl Weaver actually visited the Kocher household. "Weaver told my father that he thought I was a good ball player," Bob remembers. "Weaver told my father that I might make it in the majors."

Bob's dad had his doubts. The Orioles already had the best third basemen to ever play, and third base was Bob's position. "My father said I would never make the team because of that line up," Bob says.

Weaver suggested that Bob Kocher could play for the Yankees. Bob's father shook his head. "I believe I'd cut my son's legs off before I'd see him in pinstripes," his father said.

"He hated the Yankees," Bob says of his father. "I just hung it up. My father and mother really did think that I was losing my youth. I was disappointed, but my father was a good judge of talent and he didn't think I'd make it in the biggies."

Bob's father had attempted at least one venture of his own that ended in near financial ruin. He and his brother decided to raise chickens on the Eastern Shore of Delaware, between Bishopville and Selbyville. They had about 300,000 chickens and things were going along pretty smoothly until the hurricane hit. The rivers and tidal creeks swelled with rain, overflowing their low banks, inundating the surrounding farmland.

"We were in waist high water throwing chickens up on the roof," Bob recalls. "And as soon as we threw them up they'd fly right back down into the water. They're the dumbest animals in the world." A couple days later the water subsided, and the stench of rotting chicken rose from the earth. Only 8,000 chickens had survived. "He lost a lot of money on that venture," says Bob of his father.

When Bob graduated high school he at-

tended University of Maryland in College Park where he studied sociology. But after a year he left school, and went to work for Macy's and Turnbaugh, a food distributing company.

He literally started his professional career cleaning toilets. "I went to work for them as a janitor," Bob says. "And I worked for them for the next seventeen years." He worked his way steadily up from the very bottom. He became a warehouse stocker, an order puller, a warehouse supervisor, an extra driver, a delivery man. And then, when he was 21, Bob was made a salesman. At about the same time, Uncle Sam decided he wanted Bob, too.

He was drafted in the U.S. Army, did his basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and advanced training out in Oklahoma. He was an artillery surveyor and reconnaissance specialist. He did a 13-month tour in Vietnam, and then finished his stint stateside at Fort Holibird, where he worked in the commissary.

When he returned to civilian life, Bob again went to work as a salesman at Macys and Turnbaugh. This is where he received his education. He learned everything there was to know about business directly from Mr. Turnbaugh.

"He was like my second father," says Bob. "He's ninety-some years old today living in Florida, but I still talk to him about three times a year. He taught me all my work ethics."

Mr. Turnbaugh was an old school businessman who worked with his men in the trenches. "He owned this huge company and he'd be out there with a raggedy old sweater with holes in it helping us load trucks at night," Bob recalls. "He'd be on the forklift and do anything else. Mr. Turnbaugh taught me the ropes of the food business."

Turnbaugh gave Bob one of the least



productive sales territories the company worked. Within six months, that territory was third from the top, and by the by, under Bob's watchful eye, it became the top sales route. He was soon promoted to supervisor of sales and then manager, and began opening new territories. Under Bob's supervision, the company expanded into southern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, the Delmarva Peninsula, West Virginia and Fredericksburg. He also opened up military base commissaries from Maine to Florida. It was all very lucrative.

"We were the world's largest distributor of Borden's products and Hellman's products," says Bob. "We were the second largest food distributor in the entire country."

When Bob started with the company they had six 16-foot refrigerated trucks and three vans. By the time he left, Mays and Turnbaugh had a fleet of 52 trucks and nine tractor-trailers.

As Mr. Turnbaugh edged toward retirement, he devised a plan that would eventually allow Bob to buy the business. But it never panned out. The other partner had a son who wasn't crazy about the idea. So Bob uprooted his family (by that time he had three kids—Kelly, Holly and Robbie) and headed to Richmond for a job with a food distributor that had a facility on Arthur Ashe Boulevard, right across from the Diamond. That didn't last long, though. There was something a little shady about the business.

But Bob had his eye on a small mom and pop grocery store in the heart of the Fan. Called Price's Market, it was a small space and not very well stocked. And it was antiquated, with fixtures pre-dating the Second World War, a very small walk-in refrigerator, and belt-driven compressors.

Bob saw potential there. He rented the space and moved in new stock. Over the

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Bob and Vera Kocher at the Christmas on MacArthur Parade.

next two years he completely upgraded the space. During a three-week period he worked after the store closed until it reopened the next morning. “I redid the whole inside,” he says. It was the birth of a Fan institution, an amazing store, one-of-a-kind, with a smattering of just about everything under the sun.

“We believed that if you wanted it we would have it,” says Bob. “I had one guy who would throw a challenge out to me. He’d call me once every six weeks and say I need this or that. He called me on a Sunday and said, ‘I got you this time. I was working on my car today and I broke my radiator hose clamp, you don’t have one?’ And I said, ‘Yeah, I’ve got one. What size you need? Two inch, one inch?’ He said, ‘You’re lying,’ I said, ‘No I’m not.’”

If you were fortunate enough to have lived in the Fan between 1980 and 2000 chances are you visited Price’s on a fairly regular basis. There was even a coffee club there, where a group of people would come in each morning, pour coffee, jape and jaw, discuss current events. They’d pay a fixed weekly fee for their coffee. They could pick up a copy of the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, even the Times-Dispatch. And they could do it 363 and a half days a year, for Price’s was closed only on Christmas Day and open half a day on Thanksgiving.

Price’s had a substantial deli section and sold fresh cut steaks and other meats. Different days of the week they offered different lunch specials. It was meat ball

subs on Fridays and Philly cheese steaks on Thursdays. “I’d slice the round, take Bermuda onions, cook them all up and fry them up and make steak and cheese subs with hot peppers, lettuce tomato, mayonnaise,” says Bob. “We sold anywhere from 45 to 50 to Universal Ford on West Broad every Thursday. We had other places. We’d sell 150 meatball subs on Friday.”

And throughout the store, Price’s sold novelty items that simply couldn’t be found anywhere else. There were whopper snappers that would make a small firecracker report when you threw them on the sidewalk, and champagne poppers that shower strands of colored paper like confetti.

But Price’s was best known for its selection of wine. There were open cases lining the aisles, scores of varieties to choose from, and they were very easy on the wallet. “I would buy out wines that were to be closed out or found stock reduction deals, and then put them on sale,” Bob says. At one point he bought 13,000 cases from Kronhiem out of Baltimore, another time he bought 17,000 cases of wine from another distributor. He had to rent three garages in the alley to store the wine, but he sold it cheap and he sold it fast. In less than six months it was all gone.

Word of his wine and the pricing spread across Virginia. “We were famous for doing a lot of this kind of quantity buying,” says Bob. “I had people come in from Tappahannock, had a lot of people from Fredericksburg, Charlottesville,

Williamsburg.”

And just as suddenly as it had all started 20 years before, it was over. The landlord of the property decided not to renew the lease. “It was very hard,” Bob says.

On May 1, 2000, with the stock cleared out, Bob Kocher sat on a milk crate in the middle of the store, staring at the empty shelves and the bare walls. He thought about the employees, some of whom had worked with him for seventeen years. He remembered Bruce Cooper and Carolyn Jones, and Marie Louise—the blue-eyed blonde woman with the thick German accent. As these images played through his mind, Bob Kocher began to cry. He wept, sitting on the milk crate, for nearly an hour. “It was like losing a child,” he remembers. “We were open seven to midnight, seven days a week, for twenty years, and then we were closed forever. It was hard to get over.”

He took the summer off and the following fall began selling wines, with the prospect of eventually owning a good portion of the distributorship. But for one reason or other things didn’t work out.

For quite some time Bob had been toying with the idea of opening a wine and beer shop of his own. After all, he knew as much about wine as anyone in Richmond. It had become one of his primary fields of study.

Bob considered opening a shop in different areas of the city, but eventually chose Bellevue. Every Wednesday for about a month, he would park his car on MacArthur Avenue and walk ten blocks in every direction. He chose Wednesday because it was trash day and the recycling bins were lined up at curbside. He rooted through the discarded cans and bottles, taking notes. “I wanted to see if people were buying wines, and if they were, what kinds of wine they were buying,” he says. “That’s how I made my decision to come over here. That was a lot of it.”

He purchased the building on December 15, 2003 and started a complete renovation two weeks later. Steve Herndon laid the ceramic tile floor. Billy Fisher did the carpentry. “I worked like a dog to get it open,” according to Bob. On May 6, 2004 Once Upon a Vine opened its doors to the public for the first time.

Just a little over a year after opening, the

shop has already exceeded the third year projection. “We made an impact,” says Bob. “Thank God for the community. It’s been absolutely spectacular. Ninety-nine percent of the customers have come back and told me they like the wines I suggest.”

He considers his success for a moment. He tells me that unlike some of the “big box” wine stores, he doesn’t push expensive wines on people, wines that can command a \$15 or \$20 mark up. Instead, he helps his customers understand that some wines that cost seven dollars are every bit as good as a \$30 bottle of wine.

And his mark ups tend to be modest. He understands people are looking for a deal and that’s what he gives them and they come back for more. “I don’t put a fifty percent mark up on a bottle,” he says. “I look for volume. I’d rather have a fast nickel than a slow dime. That’s my philosophy.”

A philosophy that seems to be working very well. The shop hops at the Friday night wine tastings and throughout the week and over the weekends.

We walk down the aisles of wine, the colored glass of the bottles—green, blue, brown, amber—catching the light like rare jewels. He tells me that the name Once Upon A Vine was the name of a short-lived shop over on Main Street. It was owned by Bob’s long-time friend Patrick Miffleton. “When I approached him about it, he got all teary-eyed,” says Bob. “He’s a good friend and I wanted to do it in his honor.”

And the name works well for the shop. “Beer is made from hops that grow on vines,” Bob Kocher says. “Wine is made from grapes which grow on vines. So, everything we have in here was once upon a vine.”

Across the alleyway from his building, vines entwine a fence, and clusters of grapes, green as sandblasted bottle glass, ripening and thickening for the plucking, dangle from the tendrils in a tantalizing manner, announcing what is just across the way. **NB**

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BELLEVUE OUR TOWN

BELLEVUE HAS A SOUL. IT HAS TREES. IT HAS ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRITY.

It has animals, and not just dogs and cats and other pets (though we do have plenty of them); but also an abundance of the wild sorts, a plethora of squirrels and rabbits, along with chipmunks, possums, raccoons, foxes, ground hogs, birds of prey and songbirds, snakes and toads and tree frogs, even coyotes. Plus this: Bellevue has diversity both in terms of the people who inhabit it and the houses they dwell in. And there are no restrictive covenants here. You can paint your house whatever color you choose, and you are not required to have a front yard covered with the godawful mono-culture of a green lawn. Bellevue has sidewalks and a maze of alleys, and though many of the streets are gridded—others meander like their rural cousins. It combines the convenience of the city with the natural beauty of the country. Often called a neighborhood, Bellevue is really more like a town, a small village of 1,200 homes, with two blocks of independently owned businesses that satisfy virtually all the needs of its residents. There is no other enclave like it in Richmond. Or anywhere else.

MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO, my former wife Joany and I decided to leave the Fan, where we had both lived the majority of our adult lives. It had become increasingly yuppified, with many of its rougher edges sanded smooth, and VCU was chopping down much of the old urban growth of ancient structures and erecting massive, nondescript steel and concrete towers in their place. So frequently, on bikes, we pedaled north and quite accidentally stumbled upon Bellevue, and immediately fell in love with the place.

We were fortunate to find a classic bungalow built in 1922 that begged for some tender loving care. It was bordering on the ramshackle. Rusted galvanized steel gutters and

downspouts, bare wood trim on window frames and sashes, a sagging front porch. And the interior was in even worse shape. It seemed there had been no real improvements since the early 1960s based on the pink and green plastic tiles in both the kitchen and bathroom. But the bones of the house were solid, and the architectural accoutrements, within and without, intact. We purchased it at a comparative song.

After taking possession of the house, we steamed away five layers of wallpaper from the ceilings and the walls in every single room. And beneath those ancient layers of paper we uncovered walls of plaster on lath that had never been painted. We skim-coated

the plaster, sanded the walls and ceilings, primed them, and then painted them with two finish coats. Because we intended to have a child in the near future, we burnt away all of the lead-paint on the trim. We sanded all the floors that turned out to be quartersawn heart pine, sealed them with marine spar varnish; stripped the painted mantelpiece, revealing Honduran mahogany. For a good three months we lived in the dining room on a mattress surrounded by all of our earthly possessions, save for what was stored in the basement and out in the shed. But when our work was done, we both marveled at what we had accomplished: the house was restored. Shortly after that we tackled the exterior, re-glazing all 19 windows, caulking seams, burning

off the lead paint, priming the trim, and so on.

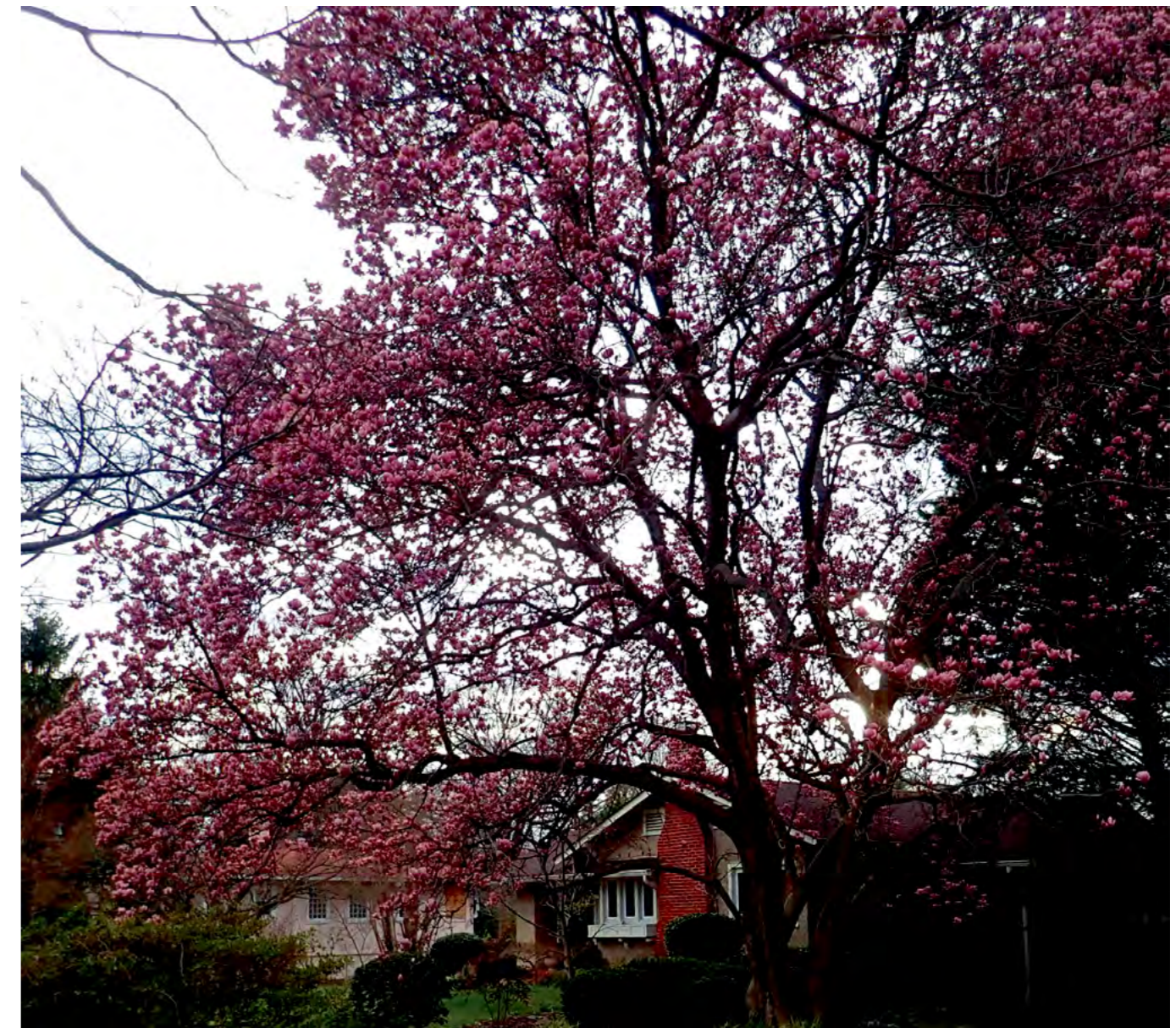
IN THOSE DAYS THERE WERE only two restaurants in Bellevue (today there are nine, along with a juice bar). They were Dot's Back Inn and Zorba's, both on MacArthur Avenue, along with a great dive of a bar called Cock and Bull, which later morphed into Shenanigans, both of which offered live music, nightly. On Bellevue Avenue there was a bakery that at times served breakfast and lunch, but you never knew when.

MacArthur Avenue felt like a ghost town at the time, many of the storefronts on the east side of the street were vacant; one of them was filled with old pinball machines. Rich's

Stitches had a presence, but there were none of the restaurants that now flank that side of street—Stir Crazy, Demi's Mediterranean Kitchen, Mi Jalisco, and Neighbor—and there was no Once Upon a Vine, though across the street Nutall's, owned by Eddie Chang, was doing a good and steady business.

Back in 2004 two new businesses moved onto MacArthur Avenue that fueled a Renaissance of sorts. That year Stir Crazy, in its first incarnation under Jerry Bistline, opened, and then in May of that same year Bob Kocher unveiled Once Upon a Vine, which became an instant success. Bob stocked a vast array of wine and beer, nostalgic candies, and gourmet items, and cigars, and other treats. From the moment Bob opened his shop in Bellevue, he became an integral part of the neighborhood and the Bellevue Merchants Association. On his massive parking lot, he hosted the first Christmas on MacArthur, an annual holiday event that benefits Toys-for-Tots, which continues to this day on the second Saturday of December. And every year Bob hosted an Oktoberfest and an anniversary celebration.

About three years later, over on Bellevue Avenue, Shanan Chambers breathed new life into a building that had previously housed a business that sort of specialized in antiques, and had been a hardware store in a former life. Shanan, along with her father and a team of contractors, gutted the old building, installed new systems, and



Saucer magnolias in full bloom.

after months of wrangling with inept city officials, Northside Grille, which has become the Northside's premier venue for live music and fine food, was born. The Bellevue strip now includes a wide assortment of businesses, including Classic Touch Cleaning and Studio Art 1229, Nicola Flora, Little House Green Grocery, and Up All Night Bakery.

Well before Facebook launched

Marketplace, residents of Bellevue, whenever they were getting rid of old furnishings and such, would simply line them up neatly along the alleyway behind their home, where other residents could shop to their heart's content. We furnished much of our house with these alley finds, and have passed along our share of discarded items that have since found new homes elsewhere in Bellevue.

During the summer of 1999, many of the giant oak trees that made up a sort of urban forest at the northeast corner of Hermitage and Laburnum were felled to make way for a new school called Linwood Holton Elementary. Things there got off to a rocky start, until David Hudson took command of the school, which would become one of the very best elementary schools in the city, public or private. He as-



Nuttall's Market



Classic Touch Cleaning and Studio Art 1229



Once Upon a Vine

by **CHARLES MCGUIGAN**
cover image by **CATHERINE MCGUIGAN**



A tour through Bellevue's stunning architectural array.





Indira & Guppy Jo drew a large crowd on Greycourt Avenue at the first Bellevue Porchella.

sembled a remarkable faculty, and was available to parents, night and day. After 13 years as principal at Holton, David took command of Franklin Military Academy, but his legacy lives on under new administrative leadership.

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE pandemic, when the world as we knew it came to a screeching halt, I would walk for several hours each day throughout the city, but primarily here in Bellevue. It was quiet, almost eerily so. The sounds of man and his machines had come to a standstill. No car engines humming and purring and grunting.

And thankfully not one leaf blower polluting the blessed silence. But I could hear bird song in great profusion, and even the sound of the branches of leafless trees making faint scratching noises whenever there was even the slightest breeze. And sitting on my front porch in the late afternoon, I could hear a chipmunk claw earth. I'd never heard either of those sounds before, and the experience bordered on the mystical.

Several days into the shutdown, I began to see other folks on the street. And one bright, cool afternoon, as I made my way west on

Bellevue just off Clinton, I ran into Laura Ann Singh and her young daughter who just so happened to be riding her bike for the first time without training wheels. As always, I had my Sony Handycam, and I asked Laura Ann if she would mind singing a song. Still walking behind her daughter, who was making remarkable progress on two wheels, Laura Ann's angel voice began to spill forth "Smile," and the world seemed to change. I filmed her.

At the end of that first month of Covid, the day after Bill Withers died, I happened to be walking down Claremont and saw my

friend Charles Arthur. I asked if he'd sing a song in memory of the great man. So with his wife, Sara, and daughter, Josie, and son, Loudon, the Arthurs put on a performance of "Lean on Me" that was the best rendition of that song I have ever heard. Again, I made a video.

Then just a week later, John Prine died. The following day as I was walking up to the Bellevue commercial strip, I ran into singer-songwriter Micah Berry who was sitting on the steps of his front porch with his son and daughter. He had his guitar out, and I mentioned John Prine. He nodded and in a few minutes was playing and singing "Angel from Montgomery."

I posted all three videos on social media and the response was overwhelming. People wanted live music back. And that's exactly what they would get in Bellevue, thanks to Brooke Ullman.

IN JULY OF THE PANDEMIC YEAR, Brooke watched from her front yard as a family with three kids strolled along the sidewalk across the street. They briefly stopped in front of the home of Haze and Dacey, two local musicians who happened to be playing on their front stoop.

As Haze played on his upright bass, Dacey improvised a song for the kids. When the family moved on, Brooke crossed the street and told her neighbors how much she enjoyed listening to them play. And then she said this: "Wouldn't it be

cool if we had an outdoor walk-around little music thing?"

"Yeah, it'd be great," said Dacey. "Will you do it? Will you organize it?"

Brooke did, and with the help of Don Glazer, Rob McAdams and others, Bellevue Porchella was born, a full day of music that rivals the Richmond Folk Festival, and is sponsored by the Bellevue Civic Association. This year's Porchella will be held from 12:30 pm till 6 pm on April 20. (Along with Porchella and Christmas on MacArthur, Bellevue also hosts other annual events including Plant Swaps, National Night Out on MacArthur, and the Bellevue Garden Walk, which began 34 years ago.)

At that first Porchella, hundreds walked the streets, some for the first time in seven months. They would gather in small clusters—socially distanced and face mask-clad—standing on the sidewalks and along the gutters, spilling into the streets, with eyes smiling and ears cocked toward porches where musicians played and sang.

After the hammer of the pandemic struck, Bellevue business owners immediately reconfigured how they were going to do business. It was really astonishing to witness, and it happened overnight. This, too, though: Bellevue residents universally supported our locally owned businesses and all of their employees.

IF THERE WERE A GOLDEN RULE governing Bellevue, it would be



Jonathan the Juggler performed at a past National Night Out in Bellevue.

something like this: Exclude no one and accept everyone. And the values here are overwhelmingly progressive. Not in a million years would we ever consider banning books from any library shelves. And along with our public library on Westbrook we have scores of Little Free Libraries. It's so important to remember that one of our greatest Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, created the very first free library in Philadelphia because he understood that to preserve a democracy you had to nurture a well-educated electorate, otherwise you would run the risk of electing

a despot. An interesting thing happened at noon on January 20, 2021, a sunny day in the dead of winter, at the exact moment Joe Biden was sworn in as president. Front doors throughout our small town opened, and people spilled out into the streets, yelling and clapping and lighting fireworks. The joy was palpable. About a week later, at Stir Crazy, I was sitting at a table telling a friend from out-of-town about what happened that day. An older man at a table next to us sat with a woman. They were nursing a couple of warm drinks. He overheard

our conversation, and then said this: "I'm ninety-two, and I've lived in Bellevue my entire life. The only other time something like that happened was on V-E Day. But there were even more people celebrating last week."

Creativity, in one form or other, abounds in Bellevue. If you swing a dead cat, even a short-tailed one, in any direction, you are likely to brush up against a potter or a painter, a sculptor or an illustrator, a musician or a writer. They are everywhere. Along with teachers and doctors and lawyers and nurses and small business owners



A tour through Bellevue's stunning architectural array.



A tour through Bellevue's stunning architectural array.





Fairy haunts of Bellevue.

and landscapers and social workers and psychologists, and, I suppose, butchers and bakers and candlestick makers.

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO RAISE my kids here, and am thankful every day for that good fortune. I taught them to ride bikes on our streets, and we explored the hidden treasures of Bryan Park where they learned to appreciate nature and to protect it (my daughter is not only a talented artist, but also an environmental scientist fully committed to saving our biosphere from the corporate greed which is threatening all life on this planet). During a particularly rough period, when the schools had failed to protect

my son from bullies, he and I spent every day for several hours in Stir Crazy, where we both worked on our laptops. That went on for more than a year. (Incidentally, Charles now works every Saturday at Stir Crazy, which is owned and operated by Vickie and Tre Hall, who utterly transformed the business when they took over the reins) As my kids grew older and went out on their own, I was never worried about their safety as long as they stayed within the perimeters of our village. There were eyes always trained on them by our neighbors, as my eyes watched after their children.

As my kids and I biked through

Bellevue, we'd often stop and dismount to inspect, at close range, the trees we would see, some of which are enormous and among the largest specimens of their kind in the state. There's a massive willow oak on an alleyway, just off Fauquier, and another one that dominates the entire backyard of a house on Claremont. On Amherst an evergreen of some kind absolutely dwarfs the house it stands in front of, and then there's the hemlock behemoth on Pope. We would rub our hands on the bark, breathe in the smell of the trees, and hunt for acorns or cones or seeds. The deodar cedar has an unusual cone that eventually, when it becomes brown, looks like a rose, and when

it's fully dried out, if you touch it even lightly, it will explode, casting seeds, like petals, everywhere.

At the base of many trees in Bellevue, you're apt to find fairy haunts. These fairy trees, which are an ancient Celtic tradition, began popping up in Bellevue years ago, but when the pandemic struck their proliferation was like a housing boom, and kids with their parents and grandparents would often seek them out, sometimes bringing their own offerings to enhance them.

HERE'S WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THIS almost mythic place we call Bellevue: I can walk down any street here, at any time, day or night, winter or summer, and greet almost everyone I meet, not as a neighbor, but as a friend with shared experiences and hopes and desires. And I have come to know the stories of many of these people, have celebrated with them and mourned with them. I don't know of any other community like it.

Joan Peaslee, longtime Bellevue resident and real estate agent, said this: "You know your neighbors, and you stop to chat with them. In Bellevue, everybody's a part of the neighborhood."

Jo Ann Breaux, another real estate agent and former Bellevue resident, put it this way, "Bellevue is where home is history and community, joined in neighborly goodness."

AS WITH EVERY OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD in Richmond's Northside, Lewis Ginter—former Confederate officer, cigarette manufacturer, in-



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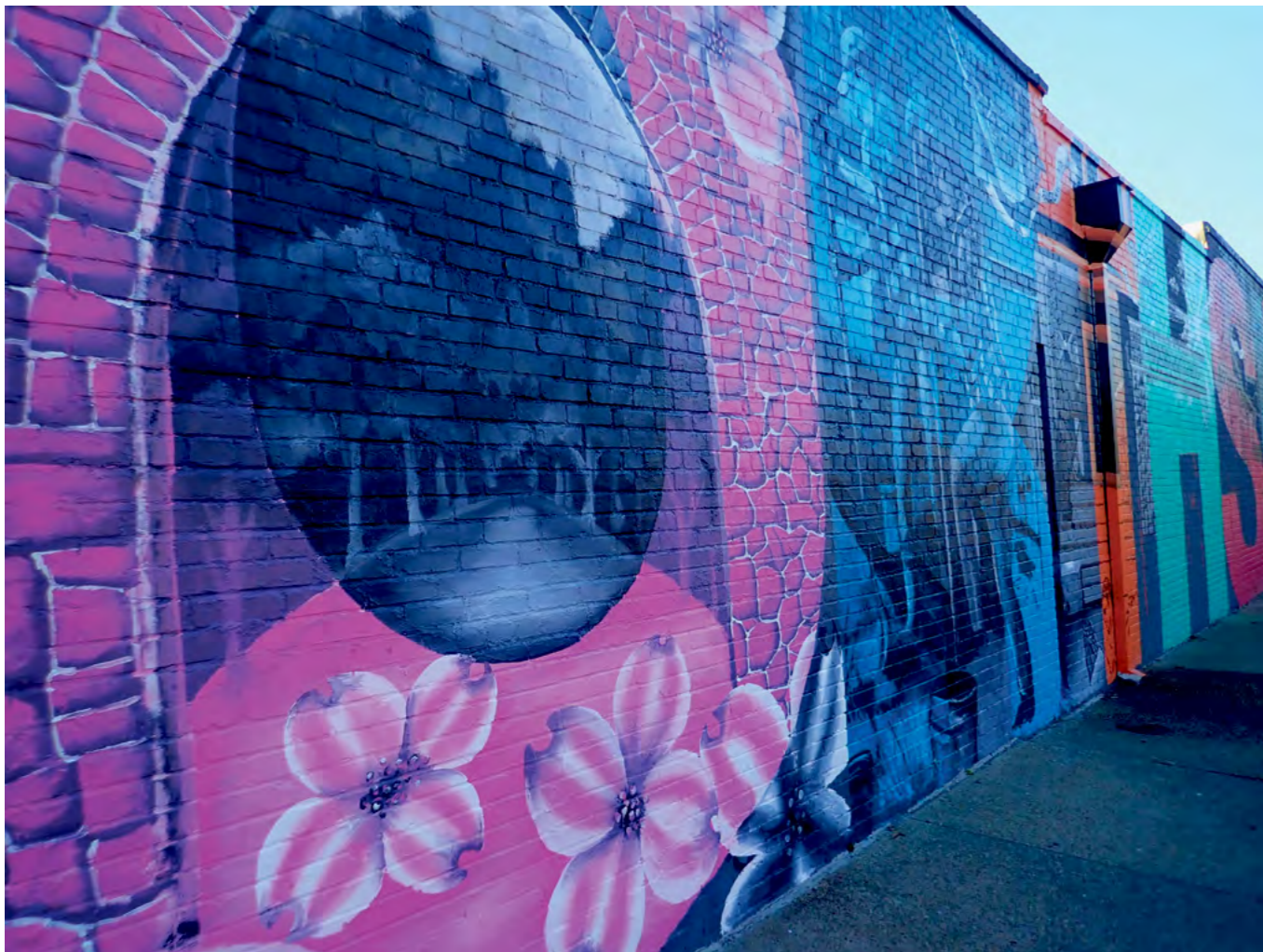


EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY



A tour through Bellevue's stunning architectural array.





Richmond muralist Ed Trask's "Northside" mural.

dustrialist and philanthropist—was the prime mover behind Bellevue.

In the early 1880s, with his life partner John Pope, the tobacco mogul purchased Westbrook plantation which consisted of some 400 acres. By the time Ginter and his partner made the purchase the plantation house was in a state of serious decline. Pope enlarged the existing structure, and created one of the finest examples of Queen Anne architecture in the country. Pope then purchased another hundred acres and began planning the development that eventually became Bellevue. He built the road that would

be named after him, which served as an entrance to Westbrook. He lined both Pope and Bellevue avenues with sugar maples, built the stone arch, but died before making any further progress. Ginter was grief-stricken by the loss of his lover, and died the following year.

Pope's brother, George, inherited the property. On the original plans drawn up for a community to be called Bellevue Park, Virginia Avenue, which was renamed Princeton Road, was inked in, along with a street that was never constructed—Regetree Avenue. Under George's direction, development of Bellevue

crept along at a snail's pace: By 1913 only one house had been built, and four lots sold.

Several years later, after George's death, his sister Margaret inherited the land, and in 1919 she sold it for \$100,000 to J. Lee Davis and C.W. Davis. Lee Davis, incidentally, built a home for himself on Hermitage Road. Because of the profusion of willows growing on the banks of Princeton Creek which ran through the property, Lee called his home Willowbrook. Today the house and surrounding land make up the core of The New Community School.

By the time the Davises bought the land from Margaret Pope, a portion of the property had already been fitted with sewer and water lines. About half of the parcels had been sub-divided into good-sized lots, "for a high class suburban development."

The brothers Davis were no slackers. They immediately went to work developing one of the first streetcar suburbs in Richmond.

THE AREA BOUNDED BY Bellevue, Laburnum, Hermitage and Brook was not part of the original Bellevue. This area contained three separate subdivisions—Brookdale, Monticello Place and Virginia Place.

Not long after we moved in, I had the pleasure of interviewing Oscar and Elizabeth Reynolds who moved into their Stanhope home when it was brand new, almost 70 years before. Of the area to the south of Bellevue Avenue, Oscar said, "We still don't call that Bellevue."

When the Reynolds moved into their home all of Northside was still part of Henrico County. "The city didn't annex it until 1940," Oscar remembered. "Back then we had a private sewer system and didn't have the gutters, and there were no sidewalks."

At that time both of Bellevue's commercial strips were booming.

BELLEVUE AVENUE ALONE WAS home to three grocery stores—Safeway at the Lamont corner,



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Principal David Hudson with the king and queen of Christmas on MacArthur in 2014.

Lukhard's at the Brook Road corner and a place called Wood's Store in the middle of the block. Occupying the space where CVS now sits was one of Northside's mainstays—Willey's Drugstore, famous for its limeades.

"I even jerked soda for Willey's during the Second World War," Oscar Reynolds told me. "It was a place all the children went to after school. Many kids who grew up here, later worked at the fountain there."

In the building now occupied by Northside Grille there used to be a variety store. "They had a little bit of everything," Elizabeth Reynolds

told me. "And they sold candy for a penny a piece, but the owner was a crabby old man who didn't seem to like children and at Halloween the children would soap his windows."

Before World War II, MacArthur Avenue was called Rappahannock Avenue. There were two movie theaters there. One was The Bellevue, which is currently undergoing a transformation and was where Warren Beatty and Shirley MacLaine, who at the time lived on Fauquier Avenue, saw their very first film. The other theater was on the site now occupied by Once Upon A Vine. There was also another hardware store, yet another

grocery store, as well as a Sinclair Service Station, and a U.S. Post Office.

"Moving the post office was the worst thing that ever happened to Bellevue," Elizabeth Reynolds had told me those many years ago.

ON ABOUT THE TIME I TALKED with the Reynolds I also spoke with Wayland Rennie, a real estate agent whose name is linked with the Northside; one of its streets actually bears the family name.

"Bellevue has a wonderful texture," Wayland said. "A wonderful architectural fabric from the Italianate to the Spanish influence with tile

roofs, from the Arts and Crafts to the kit-built Sears homes and the American four squares. There's something for everyone."

Bellevue was built in protest, if not outright antipathy, to the movement in the late 1800s which saw the construction of vast homes (not unlike the McMansions of today), emblematic of the conspicuous consumption of the Gilded Age. They were more like monuments to the industrialists who owned them than comfortable and manageable homes for their inhabitants.

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS COTTAGES in Bellevue were much more practical, and offered simplicity and comfort over ostentation and grandeur.

"There's a misconception about these cottages and bungalows you have in Bellevue," Robert Winthrop, architect and architectural historian, once told me. "People think these cottages and bungalows were second best houses. Not so. In fact, they were very sophisticated homes for people of refinement. It was avant-garde. The aesthetic was to build a charming house nestled in a garden."

It was a sort of marriage of the indoors with the outdoors, and the interface between the two was not sharp or angular, it was blurred and curved.

"Back when the area was developed, the idea was to have a garden and to do meticulous landscaping," Robert said. "The emphasis was on gardening and the introduction of

exotic and unusual plants. Bellevue is loaded with them. You see deodar cedars and red leaf Japanese maples."

And the houses were constructed in a fashion that would complement the landscaping. "That's one of the reasons you see the large window areas and the great porches and verandas on practically every home in Bellevue," said Robert. "Merging with the outside was the idea. That's also why you'll see the pergolas or arbors and the dooryards and entrance courts. When we talk about these kinds of cottages we're talking about the same sort of aesthetic and style that Frank Lloyd Wright employed."

He mentioned some of the features of Bellevue homes that were given sharp focus by their designers. "Note the roofs and the hearths,

which are both prominent," he said. "They were important symbols of the home. You'll sometimes see the hearth on the front elevation. And the roofs are gently sloping and shallow-pitched, for the most part." Robert also noted that many of the houses in Bellevue are built on man-made high ground. "They simply built it up to make the houses look less impressive. Remember, modesty was an admired trait," he said.

SOME OF THE TRAITS OF THE houses in Bellevue universally admired by contractors are the quality of workmanship and the materials used in construction. Houses in Bellevue were built about ten to twenty years after most of the homes down in the Fan district were constructed. Bellevue houses are superior in their construction.



Singer-songwriter Susan Greenbaum performs monthly at Northside Grille.



A tour through Bellevue's stunning architectural array.



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The brightly painted Bellevue Avenue storefronts.

Jimmy Nash, a former resident of Bellevue who was both a general contractor and carpenter, had done his share of renovations in both areas of town.

“Starting from the ground up, you have to look at the foundation,” he told me. “Houses in the Fan have the joists sunk directly into a pocket in the foundation where water seeps in and then rots the joist out. That’s why you’ll see sagging floors in Fan houses. But in Bellevue, houses are built with deep foundations on which a wood sill is placed. The joists rest on top of that sill.”

And take a comparative look at

the brick work in both the Fan and Bellevue. “Back when they built the Fan they didn’t have Portland cement,” Jimmy said. “The mortar was just sand and limestone and it tends to powder and fall apart after a while. As a matter of fact, you could use a simple claw hammer to disassemble one of those houses.” But that’s not the case in Bellevue, for when this neighborhood was built out Portland cement had become a construction standard. “The mortar in these houses in Bellevue is good and strong,” said Jimmy.

Along with that, all structur-

al members, including studs, and floor and ceiling joists, are 16-inches on center, making for sound and solid construction. In the Fan these members are straddled at different widths. “By having everything standardized you’ve added strength,” Jimmy explained. “You’ve distributed the load more evenly.”

Even the floors in Bellevue homes are of a greater quality than those in Fan houses. In the Fan, floorboards were often nailed directly to joists. “But in Bellevue they would run pine sheathing boards as a sort of sub-layer to the floorboards,” Jim-

my said. “And the floors on the first floor were generally made of good quartersawn heart pine or oak.”

Supporting the weight of floors and walls in full basements in Bellevue you often find solid steel I-beams supporting the load. Upended I-beams in turn are employed as columns to support the load of the horizontal members. “You seldom see that in the Fan,” according to Jimmy.

And the roofs in Bellevue, because of their design, are generally more enduring than those found in the Fan. “In Bellevue they have pitched roofs of various materials instead of the flat tin roofs in the Fan,” this friend of mine said. “Water sits on flat roofs. Peaked roofs shed water. And they’re also stronger because their framing is not straight across but angled upward.”

OFTEN HAVE I WALKED THESE streets and marveled at the details of every home constructed here. For God is in these details, and that is what makes each and every home in this village as unique as their stewards. Even the American four squares that line the 1400 block of Claremont. Each one is distinctive with subtle differences. There is nothing cookie-cutter about any of our homes. Whether it’s the eyebrow windows topping a small cottage on Chevy Chase, the Star of David stained glass windows on a pair of homes on Nottoway, the bungalows on Amherst that sport brick or stone chimneys in the middle of their front elevations, every single house is differ-



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A Bellevue bungalow gets a fresh coat of paint.

ent, and many of them were built ninety and a hundred years ago, and though they may not be possessed by ghosts, each of them has a spirit that persists from one generation to the next. Though there is change within the confines of Bellevue, there is something about it that remains immutable. And that is comforting.

There was something in the words Elizabeth Reynolds spoke to me about Bellevue more than 20 years ago that resonates with me still.

"It's just like it was when we moved in," she said. "Today there are a lot of young folks with children. That's just the way it was when we moved in. We raised two children here."

And her husband, Oscar, said this: "For all Bellevue's changed, it hasn't changed a bit. Not really. And when people move here they don't want to move out." 🏡

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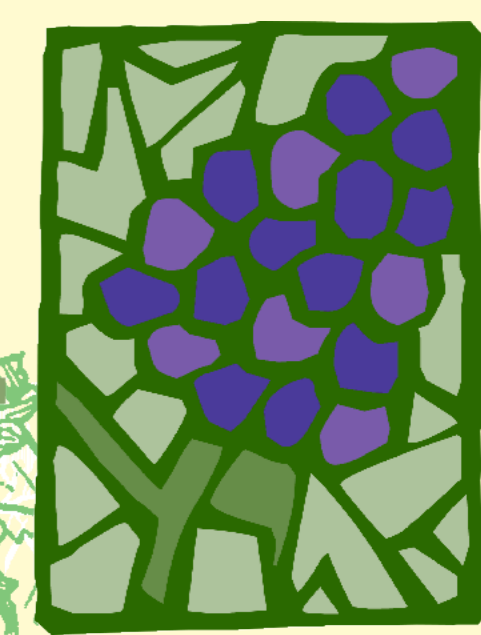
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Once Upon a Vine



Bellevue's Max Ullman: RPS Spelling Champion



Spelling Bee champ Max Ullman.

BELLEVUE RESIDENT Max Ullman, representing Franklin Military Leadership Academy, became Richmond Public Schools Spelling Bee champion on February 6 much to the pride and joy of his parents and Principal David Hudson.

The seventh grader was locked in a battle for the championship over multiple rounds with his 10-year-old counterpart, fifth-grader Glorious Edidiongabasi Steve-Essi of Chimborazo Elementary, spelling “jubilant,” “vandalize,” “allergenic,” “apparatus” and “vicarious,” triumphing with “attrition” and finally, the championship word, “affiliate.”

Max now moves on to the Richmond Times-Dispatch 2024 Regional Spelling Bee on March 7, with an opportunity to advance on May 28 to the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee held at National Harbor, Maryland.

VSH ANNOUNCES NEW HOUSING PROJECT IN NORTHSIDE

Virginia Supportive Housing (VSH) announced the planned development of a fourth support-

ive housing community in Greater Richmond after Richmond City Council approved the site's rezoning application late last month.

Rady Street Apartments in Richmond will feature 82 affordable units — 73 studio apartments and nine one-bedroom apartments — with access to onsite supportive services. A portion of the units will be reserved for individuals experiencing homelessness in the Greater Richmond area, and all residents will have to earn 60% or less of the Area Median Income (AMI). Seventy units will have rental subsidies, and the remaining 12 units will be available for clients of Richmond Behavioral Health Authority. Rady Street Apartments is permanent rental housing; residents sign leases and pay a monthly rent. The permanent supportive housing model works — over 95% of VSH residents do not return to homelessness.

“Our newest apartment building on Rady Street in historic Highland Park will provide much-needed supportive housing to address the City's affordable housing crisis,” says VSH Executive Director Allison Bogdanović. “We are grateful to our early partners in the project - Richmond Behavioral Health Authority and Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. Each of our neighbors should have a place to call home.”

MONTHLY MUSIC LINEUP AT NORTHSIDE GRILLE

Here's a list of bands and events hosted by Northside's leading music venue—Northside Grille.

March 8, The Illbillys; March 9 Beex, X-suckas, and Poison Ivy League; March 10, Mike Lucas; March 13, Mackenzie Roark; March 14, First Animal Response Team; March

15, Mike Gales; March 16, Dylan Barrows Band; March 17, Robert Bragg; March 20, Nucleus Trio; March 21, The High Frequencies, Waking Hours, and Jimmy Catlett; March 22, Hazelton; March 23, Lazlo; March 24, Willie Williams; March 27, The Velvet Devils; March 28, Party Favors; March 29, Flannel, Crack Fox, and Andy Cobb; April 3, Jonathan Meadows; April 4, The Hitchhikers; April 5, First Friday's Karaoke; April 6, Flea Bops & Brandon Wayne Trio; April 7, Mike Lucas; April 11, Say Less Brass Band; April 13, Janet Martin; April 14, The Sweet Potatoes.

Northside Grille

1217 Bellevue Avenue

Richmond, VA 23227

(804) 266-4403

STEVEN GLASS: A RETROSPECTIVE AT THE BRANCH MUSEUM

Organized by The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design, this exhibition, celebrating more than 40 years of Steven Glass's work, highlights his creative approach to the art of functional ceramics.

Internationally recognized, Steven Glass has been the resident potter at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts School since 1982. He has studied with various important ceramic artists including Jack Earl and Tom Kerrigan at Virginia Commonwealth University, and with Nino Caruso in Rome, Italy. He has also been the artist-in-residence at the Rufford Craft Centre in Nottinghamshire, England. He has lectured internationally, most recently with solo exhibitions in Seoul, South Korea and London. His work and essays have appeared in numerous journals.

Featuring over 45 works, the exhibi-

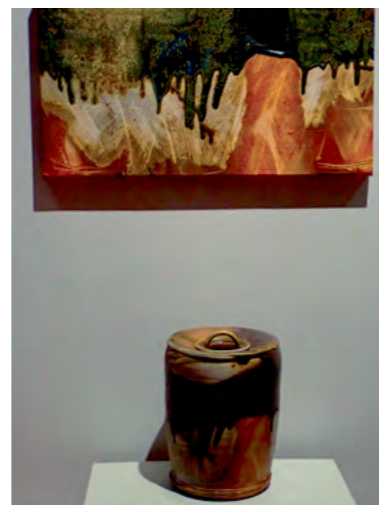
tion is curated by Howard Risatti, the 2020 recipient of NCECA Regional Award of Excellence.

The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design

2501 Monument Avenue

Richmond, VA 23220

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Ceramics by Steven Glass on display at The Branch Museum.

SPRING BLOOMS ART AND JAZZ TO BENEFIT FEED MORE

Local artists, once again, are holding an event that benefits FEED MORE. More than 34 local artists showing at the event will donate 10 percent of their sales to FEED MORE. The last event raised more than \$1,400 for this worthy cause. Along with the visual art on display for sale there will be an open bar and entertainment provided by local jazz musicians. There will be art of every description in virtually every conceivable medium from painting and woodworking, to photography and pottery. The show will be held at the Lewis Ginter Recreation Association (LGRA) from 11am till 5pm on Saturday, April 27.

LGRA 3421 Hawthorne Avenue Richmond, VA 23222



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BOOK REVIEW

Blazing Trails

by **FRAN WITHROW**

LOVE READING ABOUT hikers who explore trails I might never see, describing their beauty and the experience of being out in nature.

So when Charles McGuigan told me about "On Trails," I rushed out to pick up a copy at the library.

Robert Moor has written an exquisite book about trails that encompasses much more than just walking through the woods. On an Appalachian Trail hike in 2009, Moor began to muse about trails in general. How are they formed, and why? What can we learn about the world and about ourselves by studying trails?

Moor says that understanding "how we make trails, and how trails make us," will help us navigate our ever changing world. He begins by exploring the earliest fossilized trails and speculating, along with experts, about why the first creatures began to creep, crawl, and walk. This leads him to study those great trailblazers, ants, and how their impressive collective intelligence allows them to succeed so well.

The study of ants and other insects who create and use trails helps explain why some trails last and others fall into disuse. People (and ants) who are forging trails are always searching for the easiest and most logical path forward. As others follow, the original traces morph into a legitimate trail. Like ants, hikers continually make a "best guess" as to the most efficient route, which explains why trails are fluid and changeable.

Moor also explores the trail-making ability of larger animals. His description of the few weeks he spent as a volunteer sheepherder in Arizona are just grand reading. He quickly learns how sheep follow a trail, and is amazed at the

incredible skill of the indigenous Navajos in tracking them. (Navajos are among the only people in North America still herding sheep on foot.) He exhibits charming candor in describing his ineptitude in sheepherding, losing his charges more than once, while his Navajo hosts find the missing flock using only faint markings in the dirt.

An exploration of indigenous peoples who do not need or have maps follows. How incredible that they visualize their trails by landmarks and by the stories that tie to them to the earth. What have we lost by our dependence on Google Maps to help us navigate our world?

Trails, Moor says, are ways we connect, and new technology like GPS has revolutionized how we relate to one another. How is that changing us and our experience of the world? Can we remember to remain in touch with the physical world, to the tangible trails in our lives, in spite of the pull of scientific innovation?

All our lives we explore the trails left by those who came before us. We use these physical and symbolic trails as we walk through the world, leaving our own traces and trails behind. How will our trails change the earth for those who come after us? Reading this lovely book will have you thinking more about where you go, as well as what you will leave behind. **NJ**

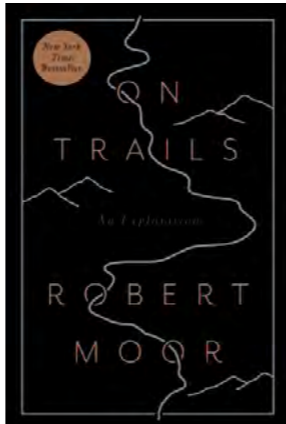
"On Trails: An Exploration"

By *Robert Moor*

\$25.00

Simon & Schuster

352 pages




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