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Cover photo,
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DIVERSIONS

Maria Kostyniuk Heart and Soul of a Ukrainian

by FAYERUZ REGAN

WHEN MARIA Kostyniuk was sixteen, the Nazis invaded Ukraine. Civilians were torn from their families and forced to work in Germany to make up for their labor shortage. Maria was swept away and put to work in a German bakery. She never saw her mother again.

While in Germany, she followed the troubling news from her homeland. Stalin had stayed in Russia during World War II, and pillaged Ukrainian crops and cattle to feed Russia's army, creating a famine. Maria was devastated, but not shocked. Just a decade earlier was Stalin's Holodomor, a famine which took the lives of 3.9 million Ukrainians.

When the Nazis were defeated, Maria was moved into a camp for displaced Ukrainians, run by the U.S. military. She met her husband in these camps. They married, had a son, and hoped to find a sponsor in the United States who would give them a new lease on life. A Nebraska couple obliged, but dropped their offer when Maria's son contracted the measles. By this time, they were en route to the U.S. with their son quarantined on the ship. When they reached Ellis Island without a sponsor, they hoped for a miracle. That miracle came in the form of a family from Richmond, Virginia.

The sponsorship family lived on an expansive farm in Goochland. Maria did the cooking and her husband worked the land. Within two years, she found work baking Girl Scout cookies at the FFV-Interbake cookie factory on Broad Street, and he secured a job at Haynes Furniture. Soon after, they moved into their own home and achieved the American dream.

Maria is now 97-years-old, and sits in distress while watching the news from her apartment near Willow Lawn. She appreciates the solidarity for Ukraine in her community, but like many Americans, worries that this solidarity will fail to manifest into any real change. President Zelensky's leadership, and the moxy of his citizens, has created a newfound interest in Ukrainian culture. Luckily, small



pockets of Ukrainian and Eastern European culture exist in Richmond — mostly via food.

"I remember using a pin to pop tiny holes into eggs," says Maria's granddaughter Kristy Kostyniuk. Her family practiced the Ukrainian folk art of pysanky: painted eggs. "We'd blow the yolk out through a hole in the bottom, then paint the shell. You'd place the egg in a basket with Easter bread and bring it to the priest."

European Deli on Broad Street sells specialty foods from all around Europe, but Ukraine is at the heart of the operation. Owner Tetyana Nikolayeva moved to the U.S. from Ukraine over 25 years ago. From milk chocolates to ropes of sausage links, the offerings are unique.

The Church of St. John the Baptist is a Ukrainian church in Lakeside where many generations of Ukrainian Americans have celebrated the Divine Liturgy according to the Byzantine rite.

European Taste may be run by a couple from Transylvania, but Ukrainian influences run throughout. From Hungarian Goulash to cabbage rolls, you will revel in the flavors of Eastern Europe.

But Balkan restaurant takes the cake. The offerings span Eastern Europe through the Middle East, highlighting specialties from each region. They refuse to share their Balkan Potatoes recipe, but given how creamy and addictive the dish

is, they're likely doing me a favor.

Maria still longed for a happy ending. In 1991, as soon as Ukraine was declared free from Russia, she returned to her homeland. With much of Ukraine obliterated by famine and war, her hometown and surrounding areas were unrecognizable. She knocked on doors, spreading word about the search for her family. She hadn't seen them in about 50 years, and didn't know who had survived. She went home unsuccessful.

Three months later, she got a call from her sister Stefania. Thanks to the efforts of locals continuing Maria's quest (pre-Google, I might add), Stefania caught wind of her sister's mission. The next year, Maria gathered her family for a second trip to Ukraine. Little did they know that Stefania was so elated to see her sister, that she contacted her siblings and extended family. They traveled from Crimea, Russia and beyond for the surprise reunion.

When the train pulled into the Ivano-Frankivsk station, about 30 long-lost family members were waiting. Though Maria hadn't seen her sister since she was 16, the recognition was instant, and the reunion was emotional. Villages and family homes welcomed her with open arms.

Lately, Maria spends her days following the headlines, and hoping that her family will have their happy ending too. **NR**

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Critical Race Theory A Primer

by JACK R. JOHNSON

MAYBE THE BEST way to define critical race theory is with a specific example. In the 1930s, government officials drew lines around areas deemed poor financial risks, often explicitly due to the racial composition of the inhabitants. Following the blueprint of these red-lined areas, banks subsequently refused to offer mortgages to folks located there.

If you ever wondered why poor areas are poor, this is a good explanation. It's also explains why those poor areas happen to be majority Black. Today, those same patterns of discrimination live on through policies that superficially appear 'race-blind' but in fact perpetuate inequality. Simple things like single-family zoning prevents the building of affordable housing in advantaged, majority-white neighborhoods and, thus, stymies racial desegregation efforts.

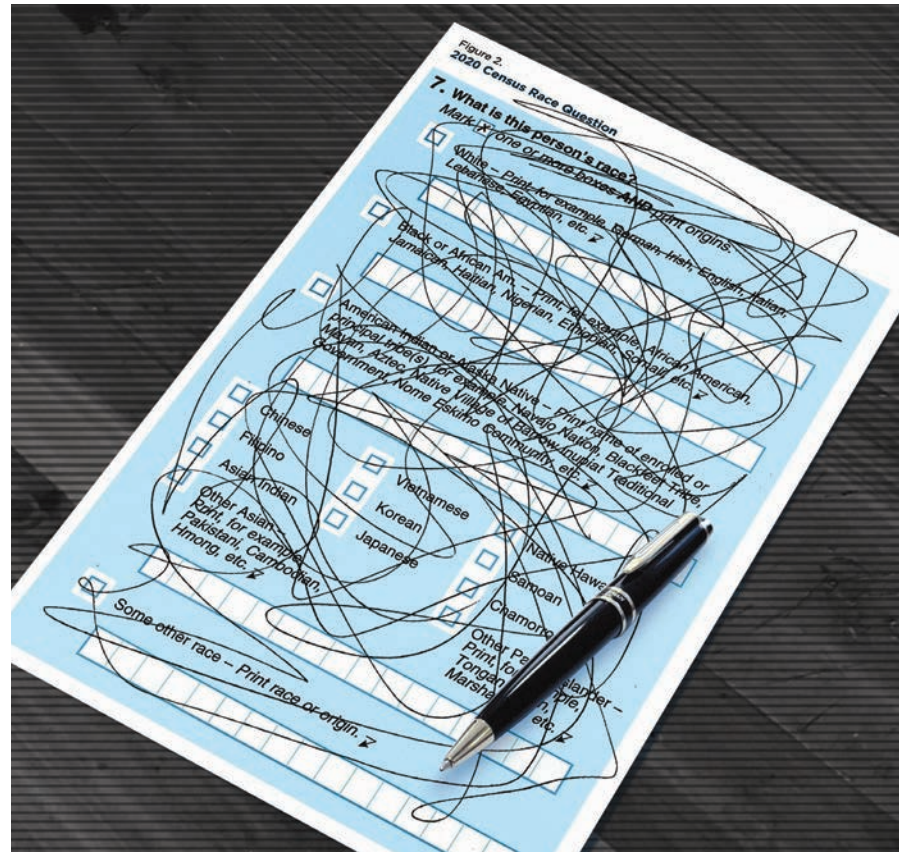
Critical Race Theory is a way to explain the legal and social ramifications of this kind of activity. According to Education weekly, the core idea is that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies.

The basic tenets of critical race theory, or CRT, emerged out of a framework for legal analysis in the late 1970s and early 1980s. From the American Bar Association, here are a few basic agreed upon principles: Recognition that race is not biologically real but is socially constructed and socially significant.

Acknowledgement that racism is a normal feature of society and is embedded within systems and institutions, like the legal system, that replicate racial inequality.

Rejection of popular understandings about racism, such as arguments that confine racism to a few "bad apples." i.e., it's more than an individual problem, it's a systemic problem.

Recognition of the relevance of people's everyday lives for information gathering and scholarship. Oral histories have as much to tell us about racism as any academic paper.




ism as any academic paper.

Contra Fox News and many of the conservative pundits and politicians railing against critical race theory, it's almost never taught in high school, and is a relatively specialized course of study in colleges or universities. The ABA also notes that CRT "is not a diversity and inclusion "training" but a practice of interrogating the role of race and racism in society."

However, certain features of CRT have made their way into the popular culture and culture wars are always, at some level, battled out within our schools. Fox News, for example, has mentioned CRT a total of 4,027 times (as of 2/21/2022).

In a matter of months, Republican lawmakers in nearly half of the states have proposed legislation to limit the teaching of concepts such as racial equity and white privilege. It's important to note that their definition of critical race theory is incredibly broad and vague, "Any anti-racist effort is being labeled as critical race theory," said Jonathan Chism, assistant professor of history at the University of Houston. In many ways the vague definition parallels some of the ridiculous excesses of

the McCarthy era in which anything that even hinted at better working conditions or a communal ideology was quickly labeled communist.

"Many that are condemning critical race theory haven't read it or studied it intensely. This is largely predicated on fear: the fear of losing power and influence and privilege," Chism said. Additionally, of course, is the age old effort to privatize the public school system through charter schools and so called choice vouchers. Demonizing vaguely defined critical race theory gives this effort a PR boost. It's no accident that Betsy DeVos recently jumped on board the anti-CRT train with an editorial in the New York Post decrying critical race theory as "a Trojan horse used to introduce Marxist concepts into classrooms" (um, no) all the while promoting privatization, "parents should have the power to take the tax dollars allocated for their child to different schools." From the school privatization perspective, demonizing critical race theory is a win/win. The only losers, of course, are the parents who will ultimately pay more, and the children who will learn less about both their world and their history. 

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Nico's Trans Mural on MacArthur Reflects Diversity and Inclusion

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

NICO CATHCART HAD already primed the wall—from sidewalk halfway back to the alley—along the north side of the building that houses Buffalo Firefly and True North Yoga & Wellness on MacArthur Avenue. She held a thick piece of yellow chalk in one hand, straight edge in the other, and she methodically gridded the wall with one-foot squares, all in preparation for a mural that has been about four years in the planning. And now she would paint it, using a scissor lift when she needed to reach greater heights, in a little over two weeks.

The mural, which is now completed, reflects the prevailing attitudes in Bellevue and the greater Northside that make these neighborhoods some of the most welcoming in all of Richmond.

On the day Nico began work on the mural, she told me this: “We wanted the mural to talk about inclusion and diversity.” And so, Nico sought out Aurora Higgs who describes herself as a queer Black trans visionary. “Aurora is a really fantastic activist here in Richmond for the trans and Queer community,” Nico told me. “She sits on the board of Diversity. She does a ton of really awesome things.”

The two first met a couple years back when the pandemic was still raging. “I was in the Agents of Change Exhibition at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture,” she remembered. “Aurora and I were both honored in 2020 as agents of change. Me for my environmental work, and her for her work with the Queer community.”

So the first thing you see from street or sidewalk is a stunning bust portrait of Aurora who wears a massive floral headdress. “That was made by a costume designer here in Richmond,” says Nico. “And then Aurora is surrounded by different floral elements. They all are symbolic. They were all selected for a reason and most of them are about unity. There’s a whole language that you can have with flowers.”

The flowers sweep back in a gentle curve, drawing the eye to a Carolina chickadee which is soaring upwards,



From front to back, Aurora Higgs, Nico Cathcart, Aliza Sterling, and Mary-Lynne Williams.

free, beyond the nets of gravity. And then the images give way to a night sky strewn with glowing objects that could be either stars or lightning bugs. As with all images in Nico’s work, there is reason for this. “The yoga studio is called True North which is kind of named after the North Star,” Nico explained. “And now this space is also being inhabited by Buffalo Firefly, and fireflies and stars look kind of similar.”

Here’s something else about this mural which sets it apart from every other mural in the city. “I believe it to be the first mural of a trans person in Richmond,” Nico said.

A few minutes later we were joined by Mary-Lynne Williams and Aliza Sterling owners of Buffalo Firefly and True North Yoga & Wellness, respectively.

“Nico has been amazing to work with and is basically the mastermind of the whole project,” said Eliza. “As you know, more than anyone else, Charles, we’ve been in the process of doing this for three or four years.”

It was a project that many people got behind. “I would say that we were really to get the whole community in-

involved,” Eliza said. “Our True North community, funding from the Third District, different individuals, and the last funders that really made it possible were the Bellevue Civic Association, and George, the owner of the building.”

Mary-Lynne, who will be offering mediation classes, sound baths, reiki sessions, and even a retail space in the same building under the banner Buffalo Firefly, was equally excited about the mural project, and having located her business in Bellevue. “I stumbled upon all of this almost as if it was divinely guided, and now I’ve gotten to be part of this beautiful project,” she said.

Aliza nodded and said, “With the mural project we’re trying to bring people together. There is strength in the differences between us, and we very much appreciate that.”

“The differences between us make us stronger as a community,” said Nico. “That’s one of the things that makes this neighborhood awesome.”

“And that’s one of the reasons why I chose this neighborhood when I came to Richmond not long ago,” Mary-Lynne said. “I chose the house

just because the energy of the house felt good, and the neighborhood energy felt good. And I came over to Stir Crazy and I sat and had tea and I was like, ‘Oh I love this street’ and then I saw the yoga studio and I was like, ‘Oh good a yoga studio nearby.’ And then I met Aliza and ended up teaching a meditation class in the studio, and now I’m opening Buffalo Firefly here. I literally feel blessed.”

When you view the mural look closely at an earring that dangles from Aurora’s earlobe. It is inscribed with a simple message that speaks volumes—“Love is love.” It is nod to one of the most memorable sonnets of modern times, a poem penned by Lin-Manuel Miranda, author of the musical masterpiece, “Hamilton”. And it ends with these four lines.

*“And love is love is love is love
is love is love is love is love;
Cannot be killed or swept aside.
I sing Vanessa’s symphony;
Eliza tells her story.
Now fill the world with music,
love, and pride.”* **N3**

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Second Annual Caribbean American Heritage Festival

S PONSORED BY ADOPT Haiti Project, Inc.(AHP), this festival highlights the food, art, dance, music and diversity of Caribbean nations. It is a free family-friendly event, featuring giveaways, a kids' area, crafts, and live performances showcasing reggae and other Caribbean musical flavors.

“Over 3500 people attended the inaugural Caribbean Festival,” says Ruben Pierre-Louis, president of AHP. “We look forward to celebrating the heritage and diversity of our Caribbean community members and can't wait to see you there.”

The festival will be held on Saturday, June 25 from 11am till 6 pm at Dorey Park, 2999 Darbytown Road, Henrico, VA 23231.

GINTER PARK GARDEN CLUB 7TH ANNUAL SPRING MARKET



The Ginter Park Garden Club will be hosting its 7th Annual Spring Market on Saturday, April from 10 am till 3 pm at Ginter Park Presbyterian Church, 3601 Seminary Avenue. This year's event will be held outdoors, and admission is free. The event will feature more than 40 local artisans and vendors, offering everything from gardening goods and plants, to clothing and jewelry, along with unique artisanal goods Plus, a White Elephant sale, bake sale, and food trucks.



MAY FAIRE AT RICHMOND WALDORF ON THEIR 25TH ANNIVERSARY



Welcome spring this year with the May Faire at Richmond Waldorf School, 1301 Robin Hood Road, starting at 11 am on May 7. All are welcome at this family-friendly event to enjoy great food & drink, crafts, music, puppetry, circus performers, capoeira, and even snuggle with a shepherd's flock of lambs or precious baby bunnies! Help us reduce our environmental impact by bringing your own garment to tie-dye. The festivities begin after the unveiling of a collaborative mosaic led by artist-in-residence Merenda Cecelia to celebrate Richmond Waldorf School's 25th anniversary. A portion of the proceeds from this event will be donated to an emergency fund supporting Waldorf communities in Ukraine during this time of great suffering.

SPRING EVENTS AT HERMITAGE RICHMOND

Hermitage Richmond at 1600 Westwood Avenue brings you the Blessing of the Pets on Saturday, April 23 from 10 am till noon on the front lawn of this Northside community. If you can't bring your pet, bring a photo of your pet. Donations for Richmond SPCA will be accepted throughout the event.

Then on Saturday, May 14, from 10 till 4, Hermitage Richmond will host Arts on the Lawn. More than 50 local artists and creators will showcase their paintings, photography, pottery, fiber art, handmade jewelry, woodwork, and more! Funds raised go to the Opening Minds through Art Program, which benefits people with dementia. Food trucks and live music.

KRISTEN GREEN AT LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

As part of the 2022 Carole Weinstein Author Series, Kristen Green, New York Times best-selling author of “The Devil's Half Acre: The Untold Story of How One Woman Liberated the South's Most Notorious Slave Jail”, will deliver a lecture at 6 pm April 14 at the Library of Virginia. Kristen spent years researching this subject so that



Author Kristen Green.


she could tell, in her inimitable way, the extraordinary and little-known story of young Mary Lumpkin, an enslaved woman who blazed a path of liberation for thousands. She was forced to bear the children of a brutal slave trader, and live on the premises of his slave jail, known as the “Devil's Half Acre.” When she inherited the jail after the death of her slaveholder, she transformed it into “God's Half Acre,” a school where Black men could fulfill their dreams. It still exists today as Virginia Union University, one of America's first Historically Black Colleges and Universities. For more information call 804 692 3611, or visit lva.virginia.gov

THE ART OF HOUSING AT THE VMFA

Housing Families First is hosting their seventh annual signature fundraising event, The Art of Housing, from 6 till 9 pm April 28, 2022 at the VMFA.

The event will benefit Housing Families First programs for families facing homelessness in Richmond.

Local artists will showcase their work in a fun, dressy-casual atmosphere. A silent auction will be held and all proceeds will benefit the organization's programs, including Hilliard House Emergency Shelter, Building Neighbors Rapid Re-Housing Program, and Bringing Families Home.

For more information, please contact Victoria Arkesteyn at Victoria@housingfamiliesfirst.org or call her at 804 236 5800, ext.128. 

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ULIANA BAZAR AND FRANK PICHEL

ON THE SPIRIT OF UKRAINE

EVERY CELL IN HER BODY REMEMBERED, AND AS THE MEMORIES PERSISTED SHE COULD FEEL HERSELF BEING DRAWN BACK. SOMETHING ALMOST MAGNETIC WAS AT PLAY HERE. IT WAS AS IF THE SEDIMENTS OF HER HOMELAND, LIBERALLY SPRINKLED AMONG THE THREADS OF HER DNA, DEMANDED A REUNION, A RETURN TO THE RICH SOILS, THE ANCIENT EARTH, TILLED SINCE TIME BEGAN BY HER OWN ANCESTORS. GREAT TIDES OF YELLOW FLOWED ACROSS THIS FERTILE LAND CRADLED BY THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS.



THROUGH THE succession of the seasons, three distinct crops, each one yellow as a noonday sun, would erupt from the fecund earth, first with mustard, then with sunflowers, and finally with wheat—a harvest that could feed an entire continent, and fill the larders of half a world with oil for cooking and flour for baking. And above it all, a deep azure sky. Combined with the yellow fields below they created a permanent flag to her motherland.

So three years ago, Uliana Bazar, along with her spouse, Matthew Propert, left their home in the United States and flew to Ukraine, the land of her birth, and they settled into their new home. And then, a few short years later, just five hours before the army of a sociopathic war criminal invaded her beloved country, Uliana and Matthew fled to England, just outside of London, and since that moment, Uliana has watched the malevolent dictator attempt to crush the indomitable spirit of Ukraine, slaughtering her women, men and children in an act of genocide the entire world has witnessed. But Ukraine will not be toppled, will not relent. Of this, Uliana is certain. And it is something woven into the very fabric of their humanity—their love of freedom—that will ultimately defeat the mass murderer called Putin, this Sauron, this evil incarnate.

Three weeks after Russia declared war on Ukraine in an attempt to subjugate and perhaps even annihilate a peace-loving people, I had the honor of interviewing Uliana, via Zoom. She instructed me about her native land and its people, whose very existence is now being threatened by a megalomaniac of Hitlerian proportions.

Born in 1986, just a few years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uliana had experienced what it was like to live in a totalitarian state. “When I was about five I remember pictures of Lenin in all my school books,” she says. “Russian propaganda would force people to learn Russian and to read books with Lenin in them. My parents, for example, couldn’t get married in the church because they could be arrested during Soviet days. People couldn’t even practice their religion.” As soon as the rusted Iron Curtain crumbled away, things changed dramatically. “I was able to throw all those books away,” she says. “The ones with Lenin in them.”

For a number of years, Uliana lived in the United States. She did graduate work in photojournalism at the Corcoran School of Arts and Design and called DC home for about four years, then moved out to Santa Cruz, California with the man she would ultimately

marry. The pair both worked, and still do, as photographers and photo editors for National Geographic Books.

“I was excited about America and the American lifestyle,” Uliana tells me.

But that all changed abruptly in 2018. “I realized I could not stay here for another minute,” says Uliana. “I had to go back. I felt I needed to reconnect with my roots. We got married in Ukraine and bought an apartment in Lviv.”

When she considers what drove her to make the decision to return to Ukraine, Uliana pauses for a long moment. “How would I describe it?” she asks. “I felt that I did not have the power of my ancestors because I removed myself from that power.”

That was all confirmed during a visit to her native land. “I went to the Carpathian Mountains, a beautiful area in the western Ukraine,” she says. “And I stood in the river with a beautiful forest and mountains all around me, and birds flying overhead, and it started to rain a little bit and I just felt the whole forest was singing songs to me. I felt it in my DNA, I remembered something, memories I had forgotten, and after that I realized I needed to nourish those roots. That was my power. I had a full vision that I had to go back to Ukraine.”

It was fortunate that she did move back when she did, for during these past three years both her grandmother and father passed away. “I was able to be with them,” she says. “But a lot of other things happened when I was there. I learned a lot about Ukraine, and I really connected with the spirit of Ukraine. Ukraine is a very powerful land with powerful people. They were always free, they always would get their power back, always get their freedom back. So I got in touch with that. If I had to describe it, I would say it’s in the genes.”

Uliana connected readily with the

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



Left: Uliana in her grandma's village.
Matthew Propert photo

ancient deities of Ukraine. “In our mythology we have many female goddesses,” she says. “We have Mokosh (a goddess of fertility, harvest and mercy). “And then there is Slava. She is the goddess of victory, and she is always portrayed with a sword. She gives courage and will and power to the warriors who protect our land. She

gives people strength to not be slaves, to not have a broken spirit, but to rise up and fight. And that's what the world can see right now. Ukrainians have that spirit; they will not give up. They have the courage and power to stand up and fight. That's in the genes. It is part of you from your mother's womb. It gives all Ukrainians the energy and

the power. They will not be defeated.”

When Moscow was just a one-horse town, Kyiv was already a veritable metropolis. Ukraine possessed a distinctive culture and language of her own. For well over three centuries now, Russia has committed intolerable acts of genocide against Ukrainians, in one form or other. Cultural genocide began in the early 1700s under Peter 1 who decreed a ban on any printing in the Ukrainian language, and the seizure and burning of sacred texts used in the Ukrainian Catholic Church. It escalated with his successors, and then, in 1764, Catherine II ordered the Russification of Ukraine. It's an ancient ploy used repeatedly throughout history to destroy indigenous cultures. The Romans did it, the English did it, and God knows Americans did it to all the indigenous tribes across the land that became known as the United States. The objective of course is always displacement. But more than that, it is the eradication of a culture—it is cultural genocide.

Of course there have also been repeated attempts by Russia to literally kill all Ukrainians. In 1932, Stalin was responsible for the mass starvation of between four and seven million Ukrainians. They were dropping like flies. It was called Holodomor, which means Death by Hunger. Many other Ukrainians were slain under Stalin as his purges ensued for the next ten

years. And now Putin seems bound and determined to eradicate the Ukrainian people.

Like many others around the world, Uliana initially thought little about Putin's words. “I wasn't worried about it,” she says. “I underestimated how sick and psychotic that person is. I don't think many people anticipated a full-scale invasion and the murder of thousands of people. You think it could happen, but you could not visualize that it would happen on your doorstep.”

She remembers when she and her husband fled Ukraine. “Matthew convinced me to leave, and I wanted to stay,” says Uliana. “We left on Wednesday night and arrived in London at one in the morning. When we woke up the next morning, we heard the news.”

And as she watched what was happening in Ukraine, something woke in Uliana. “It was very acute,” she says. “It was not just pain from what was happening, it was this deep rage, a scream on the inside, about what they've been doing and what they continue to do. Not just Putin. It's not just him. He's just a new figure who's trying to pretty much destroy Ukraine and take its culture. It's Russian imperialism. It's so deep, so horrific, it's hard to describe. What they're trying to do is kill enough Ukrainians so they can make our land available for their people. Just what they did in Crimea with the Tatars who they have already displaced from their land twice. I don't have the words to describe my feelings. You cannot be relaxed or feel safe when you have a neighbor whose goal is to destroy you.”

In her heart, Uliana knows Ukrainians will not give up the fight. Their spirit is embodied in their leader—the heroic President Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelenskyy. And she sees it in her friends and family who remain in Ukraine to fight the good fight. “They are true warriors,” she says.

She mentions a friend of hers who is both arborist and environmentalist. He is working day and night, turning massive iron train rails into Czech hedgehogs, anti-tank obstacle defenses first used in World War II against the Nazis.

“I have cousins who organized to make healthy snacks for the Army,” she says. “I send a lot of money. Everybody's involved, everybody's doing something.”

When she talked with a friend of hers from Lviv not long ago, Uliana asked, “How are you? What are you doing?” Her friend, a thirty-year old woman, responded, “I'm making molotov cocktails.” She remembers the grand-



Picking medicinal plants in the Carpathian Mountains. Matthew Propert photo



Uliana in the Carpathian Mountains. Matthew Probert photo.

mother who brought down a Soviet drone with a jar of pickled tomatoes.

“That’s what you have to do,” says Uliana. “Ukrainians have so much will they literally will stand in front of tanks and stop their cars in front of tanks to sacrifice everything because they have a cause. If you don’t do anything, you die. So all of my family and friends are put in situations where they either defend themselves or they die. It’s a horrible position to be in. You know, I do not want to kill, but if somebody comes in my home with a gun and tries to kill me, I have to kill them. Ukrainians do not have a choice. And now they are bringing in warriors from Chechnya and Syria who are just coming to kill. Just kill. It’s so sickening.”

Putin of course is the leader, but he has tremendous support in Russia. “It’s not just Putin,” according to Uliana. “People should know that. It’s a lot of people. It’s his regime and the people who support him. You have this regime that decides to slaughter and destroy Ukraine. Putin’s language is fear and power, and that appeals to some Russians.”

And then she mentions 2014, when Russia trampled Crimea and the world simply watched. “When you tell a psychopath, ‘I’m scared of you,’” Uliana says. “The psychopath says ‘I can get away with anything.’”

There is a longing at such times for the leadership of a woman like Madeline Albright. She who as a child witnessed

what Nazis had done to her native Czechoslovakia, she who had lost three of her own grandparents in Hitler’s concentration camps. She would have understood why it is so important for democracies to act now and decisively against Putin. In fact, the day after Putin invaded Ukraine Albright encouraged the West to unify and to flatten the Stalin wannabe. As secretary of state, back in 1999, Albright convinced

Clinton to intervene militarily against Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian psychopathic leader, who was intent on murdering all of Kosovo’s ethnic-Albanians. At her urging, NATO bombed Serb-led Yugoslavia for 78 days, and effectively crushed Milosevic.

The same day Madeline Albright died last month, I spoke with Frank Pichel, who remembers Kosovo as if it were

only yesterday. At the time he was teaching art out in Colorado. “I was fascinated by the fact that there was a war in Europe and I hadn’t seen any amazing imagery from that war,” he remembers. “I was listening to the radio and hearing about it. But I wasn’t seeing it. So I went over there basically for spring break.”

Armed with a medium format camera, he flew to Macedonia, rented a car, and then crossed the border into Kosovo. This was just a week after the war ended and no one seemed yet to be in control of the country. He encountered a number of refugees along the way and he was forever altered.

“That changed my life,” says Frank. “It really changed my outlook on life and what I thought about people. I met these beautiful people in this horrific situation that they needed to get out of, so I started helping them. What happened to me was profound. I was punk rock, and I hated the world and thought people are awful. Then I get over there, and it’s just unbelievable, the beauty of the human spirit. You would say these insane things to people that were strangers. Things like, ‘You’re my brother and I’ll die for you.’ So it was very inspirational.”

A number of the folks he met over there remain friends to this day. One’s a cop out in Iowa. Another is a makeup artist in TV in New York City. “They’re just happy beautiful Americans now,” Frank says.

He tells me how much Americans were loved by those who were freed from their oppressors. “The US really



Frank transporting his first group of Ukrainian passengers. Frank Pichel photo

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Celebrating Ivana Kupala night, an ancient Ukrainian holiday marking the summer solstice. Matthew Propert photo

saved them,” says Frank. “We bombed the s**t out of the Serbs, and people there were so into America, which I wasn’t expecting at all because I see the

faults in my country. But they were on the street chanting USA, USA, and a few were patting me on the back, saying, ‘Tell Madeline Albright when you

get home that we love her.’”

So it’s no surprise that when Frank started seeing the photos and film footage of what the Russians were do-

ing to Ukraine he decided to make a trip again. “This is the next war in Europe and I just felt compelled to go,” he says. He booked a trip to Poland and rented a car. At first he thought he’d be buying food for the refugees streaming across the border. “But that was totally covered by aid organizations there,” he says.

Ukrainian buses were constantly pulling up to the Polish border, dropping off their passengers and then turning around to get more. Sometimes Polish buses would pick up some of those passengers and take them to train stations or other locations. “But a lot of the people were in flux and didn’t have anywhere to go or they knew where they wanted to go but no one could pick them up,” Frank says. “So I would give them rides and that’s what I did for the seven days. I was there to just transport people from the border to another location.”

He traveled between four different Polish towns along the Ukrainian border, picking up weary folks in desperate need of a ride. “Ukraine is a huge country and some people make this four-day journey from the east to Lviv and then they get a bus,” says Frank.

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“They’ve already been on this adventure where they haven’t bathed or slept in a room with fewer than a hundred people for four days and then they get trapped in a bus for eighteen hours on the border and then they get across and they unload the bus and there I stood with a sign in Ukrainian that said, ‘I’ll give you a ride, I can take three people, I can take your pets, and I don’t speak anything but English.’ I used Google Translate to make the sign.”

Frank took a number of riders to the Warsaw train station, a popular point for departures westward through Europe. One family in particular had experienced some of the worst luck. “They were Georgian and they had been kicked out of Georgia by Putin in 2008 when he invaded the eastern part of that country,” Frank says. “So they had emigrated to Ukraine and they had gotten knocked out again. I think they weren’t well off in Ukraine.” The family consisted of a special needs teenager, a middle aged father who had trouble with his vision, and a three-year-old child.

“They were trying to get to France where they had a relative,” says Frank. “They had a total of about twenty dol-



Volunteers at the Warsaw train station. Frank Pichel photo.

lars to get them there.” Frank took them to the station but it was all but impossible to communicate with them because of the language barrier. But digital technology saved the day.

It just so happened that Frank’s ex-wife, under contract with the CDC, was working in Georgia at the time. Frank called her on his smart phone and asked if she had any colleagues there fluent in Georgian. Sure enough there was someone available. Frank

handed the phone to the father, a man named Alexander, and in no time at all he found out exactly what this twice-displaced person needed.

“It was just so fascinating because I’m using Google maps, he’s talking to somebody in Georgian on What’s App, and almost all of the volunteers were using Google translate,” Frank says. “We could never do this without the technology. There’s no way one person could do this kind of project by

themselves, but technology allowed it.”

That same technology further aided in the relief effort. Not long after he arrived in Poland, Frank began to hear that satisfying cha-ching sound from his Venmo account. Turns out a woman, right here in Richmond, a teacher, posted on social media about what Frank was doing. Within the first 24 hours \$5000 in donations flowed into the account, and that number would continue to grow. “I joke that I was making these eternal friends,” says Frank. The money helped, and Frank disbursed it freely according to the refugees’ needs.

Every day, Frank would drive his European Kia, about the size of a Honda FIT, to one of the four Polish border towns, and he was constantly amazed by the generosity of people in general, especially the Poles. He invites me to consider what would happen should a similar crisis occur at our southern border. Say people were trying to escape from ruthless drug lords in Central America.

“In America there would be tents and there’d be a FEMA operation,” he says. “But in Poland, people said, ‘Come live at my house indefinitely.’ More than a

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million people have ended up in Poland, staying with strangers. Imagine that. It's incredible. It's like going to the Mexican border and getting immigrants and saying, 'Come live with me.' That wouldn't happen. It's a different mindset."

He mentions the outright lies Putin continuously tells about why Russia invaded Ukraine. Putin has often made the erroneous claim that he is fighting neo-Nazis. Nothing could be further from the truth. There might be a handful of nutjobs, many of them planted by Putin himself, but they do not in any way reflect the Ukrainian spirit. "There's neo-Nazis right here in America," Frank says. He's right. Just think of the skinhead-pinhead 2017 Nazi invasion of Charlottesville. Think of the Proud Boys and other lunatic fringe right-wing groups.

Any justification for this unprovoked declaration of war is utterly specious. "The analogy I make is this," says Frank. "If we decided Russia was having too much influence in Mexico, would America then invade Mexico and kill as many Mexicans as we could. None of Putin's excuses make any sense at all."

Of course, the Ukrainians have made

it loud and clear that they're not gonna take it. "They don't want peace in Ukraine," Frank says. "They want victory. It's not about let's go back to the way things were. It's more like, let's ruin Russia. They are very strong. The women and children I transported were all gung-ho. The women were saying, 'We're gonna get this done.'"

Weapons and defense systems certainly help defeat the enemy. Of the \$10,000 raised for Frank's effort, roughly half of it still remains. "I'm trying to be a good steward of it," he says. "And I offered to give it back to people, and they were like, 'No, no you just put it where you think it's necessary.'"

To truly help the Ukrainians in their fight for freedom, Frank wants to put it where it will be best used. "I want to give it directly to the Ukrainian Army as a US citizen," he says.

The West, it seems, is frequently in denial of tyranny, even though it's always there, and a constant threat to liberty. It took the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor to finally get the US involved in the last global war, took two long years before we committed to this epic fight against tyranny. "The West couldn't wrap its mind around the violence

Putin was willing to do," Frank Pichel says. "That can't happen; he won't do that. But of course it did happen and he would do it.


This saying, wrongly attributed to Mark Twain, has frequented my mind lately: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes."

What is happening today is a nearly perfect poetic expression of what has happened throughout all of human history, and particularly over the course of modern European history. When Russia began chipping away at the eastern regions of Ukraine—Luhansk and Donetsk—it was impossible, unless you were historically challenged, not to think of Hitler's goose step waltz into Sudetenland, which was the beginning of the end. And the lame and naive response from Great Britain's Prime Minister Arthur Neville Chamberlain, a coward who actually praised the German annexation of the Sudetenland as a way to ensure "peace for our time." His spineless response to that invasion contributed in no small way to the massacre of close to 85 million human beings across the globe. You don't make nice with a rabid pitbull.

Thank God there was a Winston

Churchill to take over the helm from PM Milquetoast. And that's who Uliana Bazar referred to just before our conversation ended.

"You know there's this quote from Winston Churchill that resonates," she said. "He said, 'You were given the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor and you will have war.' It's very relevant today. Right now, if Putin's stopped right now, it can be less losses for everyone. If Putin feels the world is his oyster and he can do what he pleases, he's not going to be scared of sanctions. His ambition is to build a great Russian empire. And the Middle East and China and all those countries that hate the West, they will join him."

And then Uliana Bazar mentioned her homeland. "Ukraine is like a shield," she said. "We are fighting for you. People should realize that all those Ukrainians who right now are fighting and getting killed are fighting for democracy and fighting for freedom and fighting for common values that Europeans and Americans stand for. We are fighting for everybody. I would just hope, out of common sense, that western countries will do more to stop Putin's madness." 



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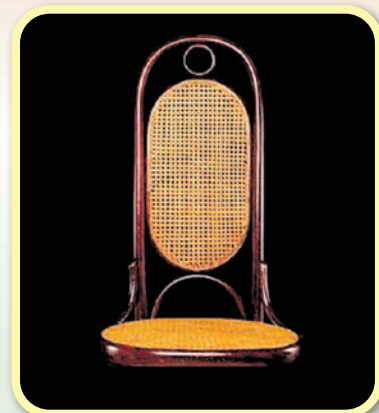
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The Fullness of Our Precious Days

by FRAN WITHROW

ANN PATCHETT, THE prolific writer whose previous books include “Bel Canto,” “This is the Story of a Happy Marriage,” and “Truth and Beauty,” is out with a new offering. “These Precious Days” is a collection of essays, all just as thoughtful and profound as you would expect from this gifted author.

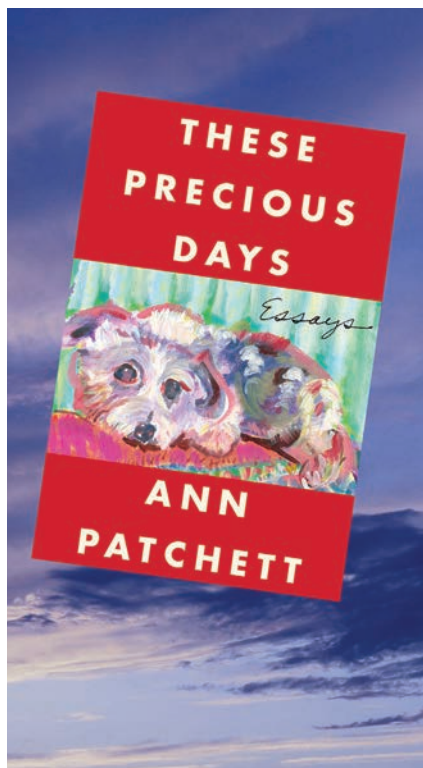
The title essay, which is also the longest one, is utterly bittersweet. Patchett befriends actor Tom Hanks’ assistant, Sooki, who is fighting cancer. Sooki is living at Patchett’s house when the Covid-19 pandemic sweeps across the world. She ends up staying with Patchett for months as she seeks treatment, and the deep connection that develops between these two women reminds Patchett just how ephemeral our lives are, how much we should treasure each moment, and what a gift it is to be alive.

Finding connection and acknowledging this gift of life is an undercurrent throughout the essays. Patchett had me hooked from the beginning with her first essay, “Three Fathers.” In this heartwarming treatise, Patchett talks about her very different relationships with her biological father and her two stepfathers. Each man treasured her and supported her in vastly different ways.

“How to Practice” focuses on how we can prepare for death by getting rid of extraneous possessions. She maintains that we can get weighed down by all the stuff in our lives instead of zeroing in on the gifts of being alive, right now. An added bonus is the joy that one can experience by giving away things that one no longer needs.

Patchett also talks about her love for Charles Schulz’s cartoon dog, Snoopy, and his connection with her own dog, Sparky. She discusses how a painting of Sparky ended up as the front cover of this book (as well as one of a Pileated Woodpecker on the back). I had no idea how book covers are chosen, so I was intrigued to learn more about the process.

Knitting, her husband’s love of flying, and her childlessness seem like such



disparate topics, but the subtle underlying theme of gratitude, appreciation, and awareness thrums throughout. Patchett is always aware of death, but this awareness lifts her up as she celebrates this sweet gift of life.

“What the American Academy of Arts and Letters Taught Me about Death” is especially interesting. I did not know that membership in the Academy is limited to two hundred and fifty people. The only way to become a member is if a present member dies. Patchett stands in front of the Portrait Gallery and marvels at the passage of time; musing over the portraits of Samuel Clemens and Henry James, Thornton Wilder and Georgia O’Keefe. She sees her own picture on the wall and knows that someday, she too will be gone, and someone else will stand in her stead.

And what is the proper response to this brevity of life? According to Patchett, it is this: “We take in the fullness of the day and the joy of being together and we are grateful for every second until it’s time to go.”

Precious days, indeed. 

These Precious Days
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Whistler to Cassatt Opens April 16 at VMFA

THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED Whistler to Cassatt: American Painters in France exhibit at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts opens April 16 and runs through the last day of July. This exhibition focuses on a group of aspiring artists who, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, left the United States to train abroad, then returned home to become some of the greatest influencers to shape American art.

“Whistler to Cassatt: American Painters in France provides a vivid account of late 19th-century France and the cutting-edge opportunities offered to expatriate artists at that time,” says Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s director and CEO. “Visitors to the exhibition will see exquisite paintings by some of this country’s foremost artists, created during one of the most complex and transformative periods in American art history.”

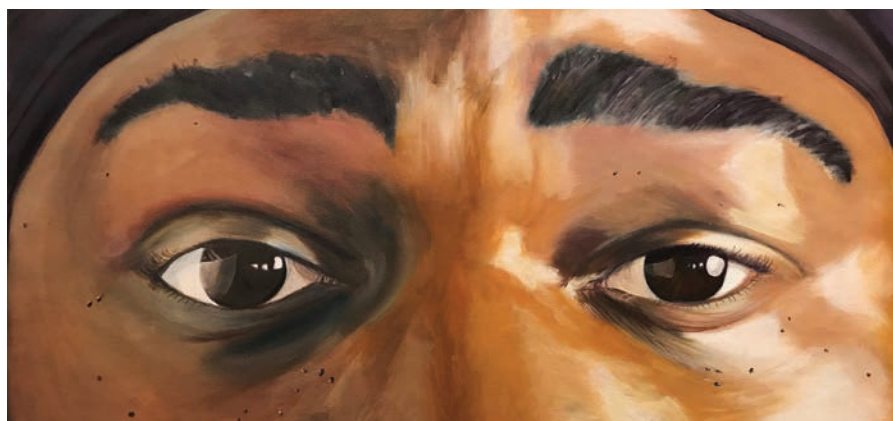
Organized by the Denver Art Museum and curated for the VMFA by Dr.

Susan J. Rawles and Elizabeth Locke, Whistler to Cassatt will include more than 100 works by celebrated American artists including James Abbott McNeill Whistler and Mary Cassatt, who traveled to France between 1855 and 1913 as part of the first wave of expatriate artists to cross the Atlantic Ocean to Europe.

“In an era fraught with challenges, Frank Benson’s painting, Sunlight, seems like an uplifting metaphor for America,” Dr. Rawles says. “A young woman stands high on the horizon under the bright light of a clear day. Peering out across an ocean separating the old world from the new, she braces against adverse winds, yet stands strong. Despite all the tension and discomfort that has accompanied America’s growing pains — both physical and philosophical — her youth and spirit signal optimism.”

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200 North Arthur Ashe Boulevard
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*Right: Sunlight, 1909, Frank Weston Benson (American, 1862–1951), oil on canvas. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
© The Frank W. Benson Trust*



APRIL ART EXHIBITS AT THE MAIN RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Gellman Room features “Windows to the Soul—the Eyes Project”. This powerful exhibit, somewhat COVID-inspired, focuses on the windows to the soul, and the results are inspiring,

particularly when coupled with Susan’s interviews with the her subjects. Consider the interview with John Jones. When Susan asked him, “What’s it like being you?,” he responds, “Frustrating. Yeah. Think about it—this is just to be honest. African-American man, six-foot-two, almost two hundred pounds. Most people see me—they get

the wrong impression. I’m not always smiling. Don’t get me wrong, I interact with people, which is lovely, but when a lot of people see me, they try to avoid me. It gets extremely frustrating.”

In the Dooley Foyer, “New Abstractions for 2022”, new abstract acrylic paintings by Danny Trent.

In Dooley Hall experience original artwork “Indian Memories Reimagined”—photographs taken in India reimagined through collage by Elizabeth Gorn.

On the 2nd Floor Gallery you’ll find “Rethinking the Ordinary”, enclosed and freestanding work by Sebastian Jackson.

All exhibits run through April 30.

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NEW WORKS BY MARK PEHANICH AT ERIC SCHINDLER GALLERY

Mark Pehanich: New Paintings and Prints will be on display at Eric Schindler Gallery through April 29. “Line, shape and color illustrate the intuitive in my work,” says Mark Pehanich. “Images are extracted from small line drawings, which are gestural and free-form at times, and geometric and formal at others.”

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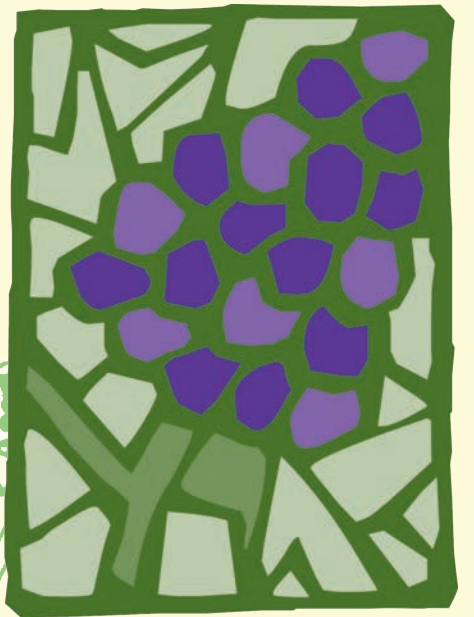
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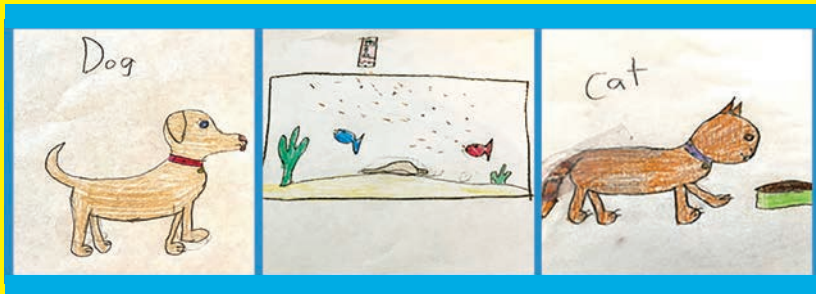
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CITY BEAT

Monthly Update With Third District Council-woman Ann-Frances Lambert

by **BRIGETTE KELLY**

REDISTRICTING

OVER THE PAST decade the population of Richmond has increased by 11% from 204,000 to 226,600, according to last year's census data. Each district needs around 25,000 residents to make them equal. Based on this data, the city needs to adjust four of its nine council districts: the 2nd, 3rd, 6th, and 7th.

Upcoming Redistricting Meetings:
Monday, April 11, 2022; 6:00-8:00 p.m., Monday, April 25, 2022; 6:00-8:00 p.m., Thursday, May 26, 2022; Adopted redistricting plan takes effect.

For more information please visit the City's website at rva.gov

REMOVING BARRIERS FOR WOMEN

The city has partnered with the National League of Cities, Leadership Metro Richmond, and United WE to remove barriers for women, especially women of color serving in appointed positions. "Our partnership with the City of Richmond and United WE's Appointments Project will strengthen the city by increasing the number of women and women of color who are at the decision-making table of their communities," said Myra Goodman Smith, the head of Leadership Metro Richmond.

RICHMOND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT ANNUAL NEIGHBORHOOD CLEANUP PROGRAM

The program runs on selected Saturdays beginning March 12 through November 19. DPW crews will collect curbside items and items in alleys from 8 a.m. until noon on designated Saturdays.

Get details & schedule at rva.gov

RECYCLING SERVICE PICKUPS

If you are experiencing a delay in your pickup, leave recycling out for 24 hours

after your can is supposed to be picked up, call CVWMA's customer service line at 804 340 0900, or email CVWMA at customerservice@cvwma.com

CHAMBERBROOK

The Chamberbrook Business and Arts District is a movement dedicated to re-establishing a business and arts district in Northside. The district will institute the Chamberlayne and Brookland park Corridor as the premier community of the area. The project will provide residents with essential resources, generate sustainable growth, and reinforce an overall sense of community.

The movement wants entrepreneurs, artists, business owners, and neighbors to help create a unique place rooted in community, history, and culture.

LEGISLATION

In 2020, Richmond had the highest opioid overdose death rate in all of Virginia, with 203 opioid-related deaths.

The Richmond Metropolitan Spike Alert Program operate in partnership with agencies across Richmond, Henrico, and Chesterfield. The system will alert the public in all three localities when an overdose spike is occurring. More information will be shared in the coming weeks as the alert system is established.

CIVILIAN REVIEW BOARD UPDATE

Dr. William Pelfrey presented his research and recommendations on a Civilian Review Board at the February 28th informal city council meeting.

GUN VIOLENCE

Councilwoman Lambert is working with city leaders, the private sector, RPD, the non-profit sector, and community leaders to address gun violence in Richmond. Councilwoman helped secure \$1.5 million from ARP funds last year that will go to gun violence prevention.



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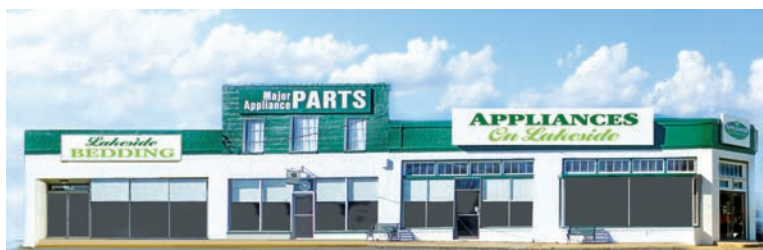


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