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Tom Wesselmann Way Beyond Pop Art

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

INTERESTING THING about art—it endows its creator with a sort of immortality, keeping the artist alive long after he's shuffled off his clay coil. Nothing illustrates this better than a retrospective exhibit that traces the timeline of an artist's career with the visual narrative jumping out at you and the artist from beyond the grave shouting his discoveries as they occur. That's certainly the case with the latest installation at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts called "Pop Art and Beyond: Tom Wesselmann."

Art is all about vision. And all too often art scholars miss the forest for the trees. They apply a narrow vision, scrutinizing one facet of an artist's work, which is akin to looking into a star-creamy sky and focusing all your attention on a single star through the porthole of a telescope. Or eyeing, through the lens of a microscope, a single amoeba in a drop of pond water and not seeing the robust and diverse life that bustles and quivers just beyond it.

The exhibit at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is not in the least telescopic. Rather, it's true to real human vision, which is binocular and peripheral.

At a media preview before the show opened a number of the people who made this retrospective a reality spoke in one of the vast marble halls of the Virginia Museum's newest wing.

"The point of the exhibition is to finally give the public in the United States and in Canada a chance to see the whole scope of Wesselmann's career," said VMFA's John Ravenal, the coordinating curator of this show. "There had been retrospective's of Wesselmann in Japan and Europe as well but there never had been one in North America so this is the first and what it means is that the North American audience has always just seen bits and pieces. They have seen exhibitions at galleries or museums that just have to do with one particular to body of work and it's hard to hold something in your mind for several years and piece it together as if that were the whole career and if you're not able to see all those shows then you're missing big pieces."



Above: *Bedroom Face with Lichtenstein (Artist Variation)*.

Below: *Claire Wesselmann in front of the sprawling Still Life No. 60.*

While Americans, by and large, are aware that Wesselmann was one of a handful of pre-eminent Pop artists alongside the likes of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and James Rosenquist, many don't have a clue about the breadth and depth of his work as a visual artist.

"The Pop Art was really just one phase," Ravenal said. "And then there was a substantial career that built on that but went in many different directions with many innovations."

Ravenal himself was unaware of the scope of Wesselmann's life work. "In some ways I am the perfect audience for this retrospective because I valued the early work and even though I knew the middle career and the late career somewhat I didn't really have a strong sense of it and I think, like many curators, I felt that the most important work was the Pop work," he said. "So this exhibition for me personally has been a really wonderful opportunity to become more familiar with the entire career and to

really gain a great appreciation for the middle and late work as well."

This exhibition was initially put together by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and will make two other stops stateside after it leaves the Virginia Museum in late July. But the driving force behind the exhibit was Wesselmann's wife Claire.

After the press crowd left for the gallery downstairs I talked for a time with Claire Wesselmann, a slight woman with Chesapeake Bay-green eyes and a braided pony tail.

"In the beginning he was a friend," Claire said. They both studied art at Cooper Union in New York and in the early years Tom Wesselmann wasn't exactly sure what direction his art would lead him. "He could draw and he has a great sense of humor growing up in Cincinnati and he thought maybe he should

draw cartoons or something" said Claire. Within a year after starting a Cooper Union, Tom fell in love with painting and left everything, except his sense of humor, behind. He also got a degree in teaching and later taught math and art, but every evening as soon as he got home he would retreat to his studio and work with his brushes on canvas. "He'd work his tail off night after night," Claire remembered.





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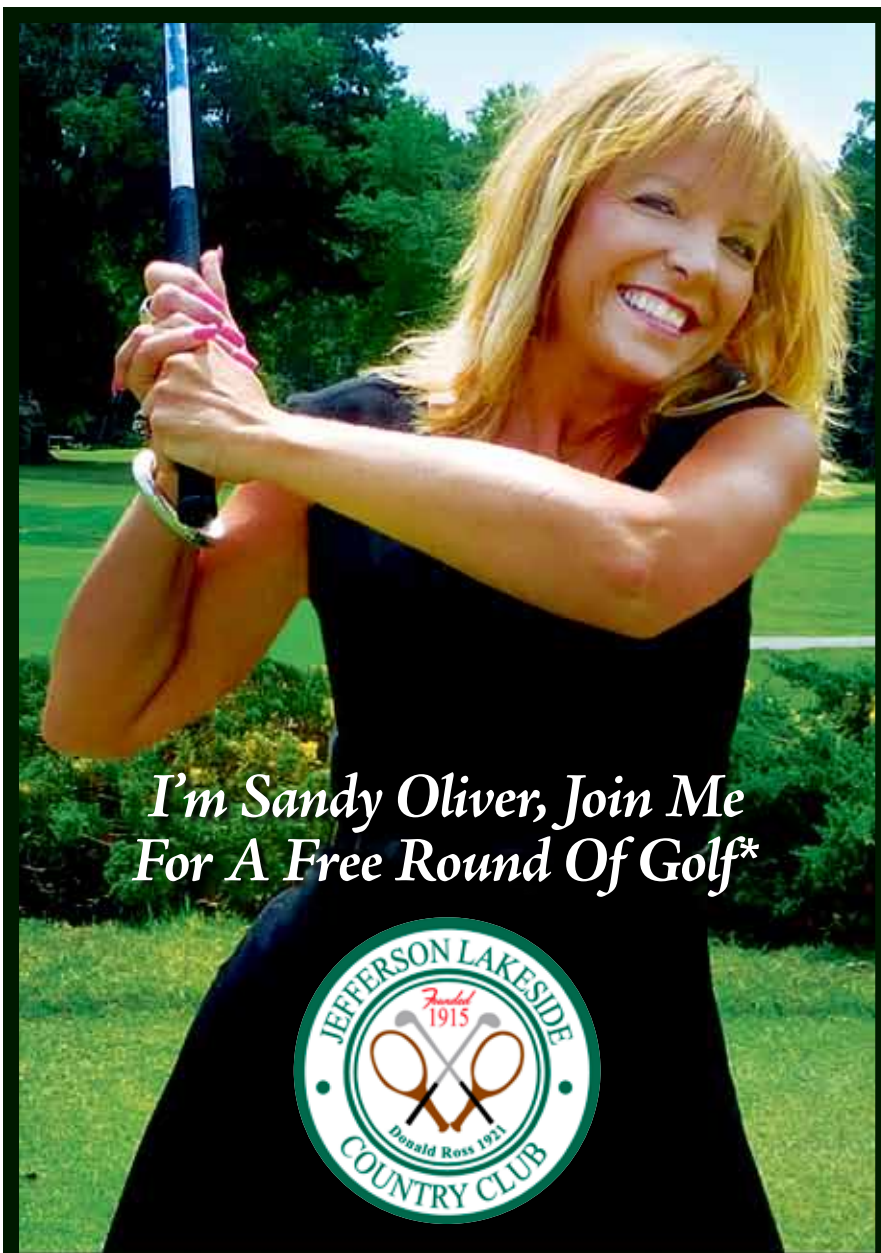
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ART



Above: Still Life No. 35 fills an entire wall at the VMFA.

Below: VMFA guard, Scotta Barsella in front of Wesselmann's Still Life No. 8.

"He loved to work."

But not to the exclusion of all else.

"He wanted to work all the time," Claire told me. "But then when we had children he said, 'I want to go home to have dinner with the family.' And he did that every evening."

From a very early point in his career Tom decided he was going to paint three things. He told his wife this: "I'm going to do the nude, the still life and the landscape." Tom was true to his word, but the way he painted these things was utterly fresh and defied existing conventions. Yet at the same time he remained, on some levels, true to classical forms. His work resonates with influences from Titian, Goya, Manet and, most notably, Matisse—artists who informed him but did not control him.

These days Claire spends a fair amount of time in her husband's studio, now hers, just a few short blocks from her home. The studio looks out on Cooper Union where their union as man and wife began.

"After Tom died I just swore that I was going to get a retrospective," Claire recalled. "I kept telling people he hasn't had this, but he should have it. I told this to people that not only liked his work but had a lot of influence and they began putting the word out."

I make my way down to the 12,000 square foot special exhibition galleries, a perfect venue for Wesselmann's works, so many of which are gargantuan. I moved freely through his life beginning with abstract collages, some of them almost box like, calling to mind Joseph Cornell. Then the Great American Nudes and Pop Art in all its commercial variety. What gets you is how he manipulated every kind of medium to achieve

different effects. He molded bas-reliefs of plastic and laser-cut steel to create three-dimensional paintings. He obsessed, it seems, about lips, sensuous ones, lipstick-clad, brilliantly red in contrast to the lead white teeth between them. And also cigarettes, some of them big as Philip Morris. They look seductive and deadly—ash, a curl of smoke, cork tip, glowing ember.

There was one piece though that stopped me in my tracks. It's a simple still life of a room, presumably a kitchen, a chair parked at a table that looks out on an open window, you can tell that because the cord of the



shade is moving. On that table are a few simple items—three oranges, a plate with two slabs of steak fresh off the grill, and a green bottle of Ballantine Ale next to a pilsner glass beer-filled and sporting a lush white head. It's an interior space looking out on the world; almost the opposite of an Edward Hopper. I looked at this painting for a full ten minutes and then noticed someone watching me, a security guard named Scotta Barsella. She lives in Ginter and loves her work because she can be immersed in art all day long. She told me that. But then she said this about the painting we were admiring: "That's where I want to be right now. I want to be right there." **[B]**



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Bellevue Garden Walk: Southern Hospitality

story and photos by CATHERINE MCGUIGAN



Clockwise from left:

An edible garden.

Garden of Susie Corbett.

Music in the garden.

*Garden of Helen Campbell
and Chris Egghart.*

HOSPITALITY IN Bellevue might as well be nicknamed white on rice. It's everywhere: on the smiling faces of the residents; in the brightly painted storefronts of MacArthur; and in the well-maintained landscapes on every block. Gardening appears to be a hobby of every resident in Bellevue. I have honestly never seen a neighborhood in which not one single house has a yard that borders on obnoxious. So saying, I believe that every resident of Bellevue could have offered to open their yards to neighbors for a few hours on May 5 for the 24th Annual Bellevue Garden Walk

A better date couldn't have been chosen for the Walk. The sky was a muddled grey throughout the day,


threatening rain but never delivering it; the effect was that of the whole world appearing to pulsate with life. For an event focused on plants, nothing could have been better. The tour started off on the corner of Hermitage and Bellevue in the backyard of a Tudor reminiscent of Agecroft Hall. Guests followed the pebble driveway to the back where they were greeted by the owners and offered ginger snaps and sweet tea. Magnolias hung over a rectangular fish pond, and rows of hedges and flowers lined the back of the house.

The rest of the houses from then on did not disappoint. The alpacas from Christmas on MacArthur made another appearance as well. Walkers were encouraged to take handfuls of food and let the gentle creatures lap up the bits. Another

house over on Nottaway had a backyard that reflected the persona of its owner, Helen Campbell, who runs 4025 Yoga. At the rear of the property stands a shack you might see on the beach along the coast, with natural flooring, screens to let air in, and candles situated around in clusters—all the handiwork of Helen's husband, Chris Egghart. Their yard was balanced on one side by a small fish pond with ornamental grasses draping over its sides and on the other with an even row of bushes to tie up the whole effect.

Another favorite was Susie Corbett's yard which had been landscaped by a close friend of hers to create a veritable back yard botanical garden. Unfortunately, the evening was settling in as we passed through the last couple of backyards so we were unable to hit

the last one on the list; however, the one we did end on provided a perfect atmosphere. When we walked in, the last few people were trickling out. Allan Levenberg and a musical cohort were playing folk tunes on a banjo and fiddle. For a while we just sat around, listening to the tunes and chatting with the owners of the peaceful little yard.

The thing about this year's garden walk is that there was diversity. Focuses varied. Some gardens were all about flowering plants, others seemed to be essays on feng shui, and others still reflected ease and comfort as if you could idle away an entire summer there. Every host extended a warmth of hospitality. If you didn't get a chance to mill around the neighborhood this May, make sure you mark your calendar for next year's Walk. 

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BOOK REVIEW

Curiosities of the Confederate Capital Untold Richmond Stories Of the Spectacular, Tragic And Bizarre

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

EVERYONE KNOWS that the Civil War started on the front lawn of Wilmer McClean's house in Manassas, Virginia and ended four years later in the parlor of his new home at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia. Everybody probably also knows that Stonewall Jackson's arm was buried in a small casket, separate from his corpse, and that his eyes, when he entered battle, glowed with some inner fire, which is why he was called "Old Blue Light".

As we commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, Bellevue author Brian Burns has given us a detailed look into some of the stranger stories that came out of that war in the former capitol of the Confederacy. You'll recognize a lot of the landmarks and what's more there are tales here that you've never seen in another history book.

Burns is an expert detective, sleuthing out real stories, or more precisely, a prospector who has an uncanny ability to discover a nugget of pure gold in mountains of stone-hard and desert-dry data.

There's Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, a Union field surgeon, who was imprisoned at Richmond's Castle Thunder down in Shockoe Bottom. Not only was she one of the first women to ever receive her medical degree in America, but Dr. Walker was

one of the earliest activists in what would become the women's movement. She shucked her corsets and hoop skirts in favor of tight-fitting pants and a jacket. While she was paraded through the streets of Richmond to Castle Thunder people came out in droves to see this walking novelty of a woman. Of course the daily Richmond newspaper railed against her and dubbed her Miss Doctress, Miscegenation, Philosophical Walker (in that regard not much has changed). Despite all these potshots, the commandant of the prison, Brigadier General William Montgomery Gardener, who would later secure Doctor

Walker's early release in a prisoner exchange, thought she was personable and intellectually gifted. After the war she became the first woman in U.S. history to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor and then went on to fight the uphill battle for women's rights.

Then this one: After the fall of Richmond, the 28th U.S. Colored Troops marched out Broad Street to Camp Lee, the last remnant of which was recently plowed under to make way for the Redskins camp. At Camp Lee, the regiment's chaplain, Rev. Garland White, who was born into slavery in Hanover County and as boy permanently separated from his mother and sold to a congressman in Georgia,

was approached by an older black woman who asked him his name and place of birth, and, if he remembered, the name of his mother. When he responded, the woman said: "This is your mother, Garland, whom you are now talking to, who has spent twenty years of grief about her son."

There are scores of other stories like these, true tales, all of which occurred in and around Richmond, and each one neatly packaged to give the reader enough cocktail graffiti for a hundred parties. **MB**

Curiosities Of The Confederate Capital Untold Richmond Stories Of The Spectacular, Tragic And Bizarre
Brian Burns
History Press
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Westminster Canterbury Child Development Center

Tolerance, Acceptance, Diversity

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

LISA WILLIAMS, WHO heads up Westminster Canterbury's Child Development Center, has 24 years of experience in the field, and it shows. She loves children and understands how important it is to teach them at the earliest age the most essential things that make us human—tolerance, acceptance and diversity. She cradles an infant to her chest when we enter one of the rooms for children up to ten months old; the child could be her own.

Westminster Canterbury's Child Development Center is bright and spacious, containing a large library, a multi-purpose room, a galley and ten commodious classrooms. The classrooms empty on to an inner courtyard which houses separate playgrounds that are age appropriate. The kids—from infants to sixth graders—are happy and well-taken care of, stimulated to the nines. My children, Catherine and Charles, spent many of their formative years here. Catherine attended the after-school program until she was twelve and even got a chance to assist some of her teachers. For both of them it was like a second home. My daughter met one her closest friends here and they are tight as ticks as they prepare for college. What I'd always been impressed by was the student/teacher ratio and some of the teachers who have been there for years.

Many of them are still here—Miss Ruthie and Mister Joey, Miss Renee and Miss Mary, Miss Latanya and Miss Paulette. Some of these people have worked at this child development center for almost 30 years and they're just as engaged with their charges now as they were decades ago.

Lisa guides me through the halls and into the different classrooms. In one of the first classrooms we enter there are babies sleeping or being fed from bottles by their

attentive caregivers. "We have two classes devoted to infants because there has been such a demand from the community," says Lisa. "These children are from between six weeks and ten months old. With them we work on developing the skills in their trunk and helping them develop gross motor skills to become mobile." Moms are welcome to breastfeed their kids during the day in a separate room.

By the time the kids start walking, they are moved into another room which will take them up to about sixteen months. "When they've developed from what I call creepers and crawlers to walkers they enter this class," Lisa says. "Here we start focusing on gross motor and early language skills and fine motor skills. And because this is an enriched environment they grow socially and emotionally. We do it

all through play in the classroom. At that point they're learning what it means to be part of a group."

When they leave this room the children enter the toddler room. By then they're fairly decent walkers and they begin absorbing routines like eating and napping and they tend to separate easily from their parents. "It's here that we help the children to develop social and emotional skills, the foundation of what they need to go to kindergarten," says Lisa.

In the next level comes potty training and the kids learn to stand in a straight line one behind the other (more or less). They talk about the weather and days of the week and holidays and what they did over the weekend. It's also during this period that the children are learning imagination skills and the fine motor skills that will enable them to write.

By the following year the children actually begin writing, squiggles and cross-hatching at first, that gradually evolve into actual letters. Every item in this room is labeled for the sake of sight recognition. But this is not about academics and actual reading. "It's about teaching them the joy of succeeding and learning to fail at time," Lisa tells me. "Their self-help skills increase with this knowledge."

In the classroom of four to five year olds there is a little more structure and writing is encouraged, but there's so much more to it than that. "They are learning to make choices," says Lisa. "They learn that some choices are good ones and what choices are not so good ones."

As we move back into Lisa office she says: "Children are born learners, they're born to learn. You have to enrich it, but you can't force it." That's what they do here. From the earliest age these children are exposed to people with infinite patience who allow them to sponge up knowledge at their own pace.

Part of the success of the programs at Westminster Canterbury has to do with an underlining principal that should probably be the cornerstone of every institution of learning. "In a nut shell our philosophy is to provide a quality early childhood and school age experience to help our children succeed in school and life and we do that by having an environment that is accepting and loving and tolerant and inclusive of all children," says Lisa. She points out that the children there come from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds and that many of them are bilingual.

As we move out into the hall and over toward the galley, Lisa says that of all the child care development centers she's worked Westminster Canterbury's hands down is the best. Aside from the dedicated staff here there's also the facility itself. "Our building is cleaned twice a day



Mr. Joey and Lisa Williams.

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Director Lisa Williams.

and the security is great," she says. "When they designed this space it was made to be a child development center. They paid attention to all the little details."


In the galley there are small clear plastic containers—one with leaves, one with cheese, one with apple halves. Caterpillars had been placed in each one of them a while ago and recently butterflies have begun emerging from their cocoons. And, of course, the kids are listening to that children's classic, "The Hungry Caterpillar".

"This is really learning," says Lisa as she picks up a pair of cloth butterfly wings that she fits on her hands like oven mitts and then makes them flap and tells me, that among other things, she is a puppeteer.

We return to the classrooms and we see Miss Ruthie and Mr. Joey, both veteran teachers here and favorites among kids and parents alike. When I tell Joey that my daughter Catherine is a junior in high school now, he says: "Oh Ruthie's so old." There's general laughter and he adds, "So am I."

When hiring new staff, Lisa is very thorough in screening. It's not good enough for a prospective childcare provider to say she loves children. "I look for credentials and experience," Lisa says. "Because child care is not an easy job. It requires very specific education."

And there's something more than that. "Interaction is the key though, a teacher must come down to the child's level," says Lisa. "I'm not interested in an authoritarian, but in an authoritative teacher who is respected and loved and loves each of the children for where they are and who they are."

Back at her office she hands me a brochure on the center and we sit for a few minutes, just chatting. "Children are precious," Lisa Williams says. "You don't punish a three year old for acting like a three year old. The word discipline comes from the word disciple which means to teach. You can teach a child to make good choices through a positive discipline approach and that is logical consequences." 

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MAP NOT TO SCALE

Linwood Holton

LESSONS OF LIFE

HIS STORY

is as much about my son Charles as it is about Linwood Holton Elementary School. Six years ago, Charles entered the school for the first time—small and innocent and unformed. We entered the conference room just outside the main office and he sat in my lap with his fingers tucked in his mouth as six people around the table looked at him. I could smell the Johnson's baby shampoo in his hair, could feel his bones (he has always been so thin) prodding my thighs. His eyes were wide and he sat there absolutely silent and I had never seen him look so vulnerable. It seemed to me that I was giving him over as in an ancient temple, somehow surrendering him to a life that would make him whole or ready him for an unforeseen destiny. My arms were wrapped around him tightly because I did not want to let him go: I admit that. Everyone at the table knew a lot about my son—Robin Barber, Christal Mark, Cheryll Hughes and Dr. Mary Pace. And so did David Hudson, a man who became an immediate friend and for whom I have the deepest respect and admiration. All of these women I would come to know and, more than that, trust and trust absolutely. But all of that took time. Where my children are concerned I am a lion and I will pounce and maul if I perceive any threat to them. This is bred in my bones, driven by instinct, not logic, and I make no apologies for it.



It seems to me that life, when viewed through the right lens, reveals itself as an unending series of victories, each one a call for celebration. Just consider the

recent eruption of spring out of the sodden earth, transforming the world overnight from monochromatic blur to polychromatic mural. Think of the first steps your son or daughter took, or the first words he or she uttered. That's the way Charles's first teachers at Holton—Christal Mark and Ricky Gay—viewed every tiny breakthrough of each student in their kindergarten/first grade classroom.

Here's how it was in their classroom those many years ago:

Christal Mark and Ricky Gay stand by the door to their classroom and welcome all the children who enter. Charles wangles out of his backpack, unzips it, removes a marbled notebook and yellow folder, placing them in a wire mesh basket, and then zips the backpack up and hangs it from a hook in his cubby. He takes his seat at a small table across from Charles McIlwain and in a few minutes the entire class rises with their teachers, facing a small American flag, their hands, palms down, across their hearts, as they recite, more or less in unison, the Pledge of Allegiance, and after that solemnity, they say a sort of pledge to Holton Elementary School.

"It may seem like a small thing to an outsider, but everything a student learns, and I mean all students now, is a victory," says Christal.

Her first professional job was a trial by fire. She taught a class of deaf and blind, profoundly retarded adults at a United Cerebral Palsy facility in Brooklyn, New York. She had ten to twelve of these adults and each one had extremely limited cognitive abilities. Most were nonverbal.

"It was frustrating," she remembers. "I had adults that I had to change and I had to teach how to

use the toilet and then I had to figure out a way to communicate with these adults."

But she employed perhaps the most important tool of a teacher—patience. And through her patience and understanding, her ability to listen to words not even articulated, Christal was able to shatter barriers, and through it all there were always those seemingly small victories that beg immense celebration.

Christal turns to the students. "I'm going to give you till quarter till to finish your class news and then we're going to break up into our groups," she says.

"Come on Charles," she says. "Good job Charles. Now, make the 'h' taller; that looks like an 'n.'" And Charles improves his version of the eighth letter of the alphabet; there's no mistaking it for the fourteenth letter now.

When Christal starts up another lesson, Ricky Gay has a little time to talk with me. "I've always seen somewhat of a silver lining waiting to come out," he says of the children he teaches. "You're just trying to bring it out. It won't come out if you lose patience. I want them to be able to speak freely and speak about the things they want to say, but they have to stay on task."

As soon as Ricky rejoins the class, Christal joins me. She turns around and watches Ricky working with the class. "We're a perfect team," she says and then reflects some on the art of teaching and its many rewards. "I love children," says Christal Mark. "When you see them grow—emotionally, academically—it's a good thing, you feel like, 'Okay, I had something to do with that.'"

She invites me to consider my own son who has benefited tre-

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN

Elementary School



◀ CHARLES AND TIMOTHY

mendously from this program over the past seven or eight months. “Look at Charles,” she says. “You saw him independently writing and when he came in he couldn’t hold a pencil. I feel if I do nothing else the rest of the year, I did something with Charles and that’s enough. They’re making progress—all of them—and that’s enough to keep you doing it. Someone’s got to care for our children and see that they become individuals that function out there in society. They’re our future, one day they may take care of me.”

Charles was fortunate enough to have had Christal and Ricky for kindergarten as well as first and second grade. They shaped him and gave him form and to this day he loves them.

In the subsequent years Charles has had a long succession of excellent teachers, each one a gem—Mrs. Hunley, Miss Smart, Miss Dupler, to name but a few.

Before each new school year started several remarkable women, who I call the Miracle Workers, would gather in the conference room and discuss Charles’s progress. These were the same women who were in that same

room when we first entered Holton.

This team is led by Dr. Mary Pace and this is what she said to me three years ago as we held a mock meeting with the other members of the group.

“I’m here to be sure that the goals and objectives that we’ve set for the child are indicative of what we see in the present level of performance,” says Dr. Pace.

When I ask where they all get their saintly patience there is a general eruption, and the comments come hurling at me.

“It’s not patience, it’s our passion for what we’re doing,” one of the women says. There’s general nodding and a chorus of uh-huhs. Then Robin Barber says: “My father once said, ‘I don’t know how you chose the path you’ve chosen because you’re the least patient person I know.’”

There’s another round of universal nodding. “I love what I’m doing,” says Cheryll Hughes. “I just truly love seeing the results that I’m getting from the children, seeing the smiles on their faces.”

I ask if any of them remembers the Helen Keller “water” discovery moment.

“All the time,” they all say.

Dr. Pace beams a smile like a crescent of moon. “One of the things that I can honestly say is we take

them as they come,” she says. “We cannot control who comes through that door and we accept all that enter and we give them the very best that we have.”

Dr. Pace has worked in schools her entire professional life.

“If we have not put that child first, then we have failed,” she says. “And we have that kind of team that doesn’t want to offer excuses. We need to be sure that at all times we’re on top of it and this team does that.”

Cheryll Hughes, a speech pathologist of more than 35 years, tells me it is not an option to leave any child behind. “The day that I feel that I can’t teach a child,” she says. “That’s the day that I retire. Never will I say I can’t. I do not give up and I instill in them that they can do anything. There’s nothing that they can’t do, it may be hard, but if we work on it together they can do it.”

Proof is in the pudding. Just a week before a non-verbal child suddenly formed words in his throat. “We were working on taking turns and so he noticed the other child saying, ‘Cracker please,’” says Cheryll. “And then he said, ‘Cracker, please.’ I think I gave him five crackers.”

And the story doesn’t end there. “And so we worked on something else later,” she continues. ‘And I said, ‘Want cracker, please.’ Guess what he said? ‘Want cracker please.’ It gave me goose bumps.”

Robin Barber, the occupational therapist, sits at the far end of the table. “If a child needs accommodations or modifications I help with that,” she says. “And generally I work a lot with teachers on how to alter the environment or alter the work so that a child can be successful.”

At times successes are almost imperceptible. “It may be as small as having a child who’s able to

pay attention to what’s in front of them for three minutes,” she says. “I mean it may be something that small. But if they haven’t looked at anything you’ve put in front of them all year long that’s a huge triumph and if you’re not looking you might miss it.”

She is quiet for a moment, reflective. “We all have things that stress us out and challenge us and we think, ‘How will we survive the day with these things?’” says Robin. “But then you look at what some of these kids are up against and they don’t know any different and they keep plugging along and they’re not sorry for themselves and they’re not sad about it they just try and you kind of put things in a little bit of perspective.”



You can possess the most glorious ship in the world, outfitted with the latest technologies, manned by able bodied seamen, but if the captain of that vessel does not cut the muster your voyage is doomed. About a decade ago Holton Elementary, which was a brand new school at the time, was on the verge foundering because the wrong person was at the helm. School Board representative of the time Carol Wolf changed all that by bringing in a new principal, a man beloved by students, parents, teachers and the entire community.

David Hudson dresses impeccably from the leather of his uppers to the trademark bowtie below his chin, and by so doing sets a standard for staff and students alike. He’s trim with a wide jawbone and an easy manner. We’re sitting in his office at Linwood Holton Elementary School.

“Let me explain why dress is important,” David tells me as he adjusts

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his bowtie. "My appearance has to be in a style that is respectful to the kids. I hope I'm portraying a good image because hopefully one day when they go to their job they will be able to get the job based on their respect for themselves which comes through in their appearance."

A half-hour earlier, as the school buses lined the drive on the side of Holton Elementary, a number of boys, climbing down the steps of the bus to the sidewalk, hastily tucked their shirts in, adjusted their belts and zipped their jackets up. The kids know that Mr. Hudson means business, that there are laws they all must follow.

"Even if you're stern," David tells me. "If you're fair and you listen to everything a kid has to say, they don't look at you as being mean. They know they can come to you and something is done."

Before becoming an administrator, David taught in secondary schools in the area and witnessed to some pretty disturbing things. These experiences stayed with him and helped forge his philosophy of administration. "I saw a lot of children stop coming to school because they feared coming to school," he remembers. "And I said, 'If I ever operated a building I would never, ever permit this to happen.'"

David Hudson seems to be everywhere at once. He is a constant figure in the halls and on the bus loop in the mornings and afternoons. Each day he makes it a point to visit every single classroom, yet he still finds the time to complete the mounds of paperwork in his office. He works six days a week at the school, holding what is called Saturday school on the weekends; he is the first to arrive in the building in the morning and last to leave at night, frequently after seven.

"I know all of my students here, I know if they're special needs," David says, then checks the wall clock. "At eleven, I give a little girl her insulin. And any kids that have medical needs I take care of them myself."

As we prepare to leave his office so David can conduct his morning classroom visits, he gestures toward a photograph of his daughter. "You see she's right in my line of vision," he says. "I always look at her picture when I make a decision. If I had my daughter in school

how would she be treated? I look at all the children at Holton that way and I tell my teachers to do the same. Would you do that, it that were your child?"

Back out in the hall, David Hudson tells me a story about himself that happened some ten years ago. He doesn't want many details revealed, but at that time he saw the world from a different vantage point and learned on a deeper level what special needs are. And this may be why he is the best principal I have ever met.

It all followed a surgery and a protracted recovery. "I had to learn how to walk, talk, everything, hold a cup," David Hudson says. "Everything I had to work with my special and severe and profound kids on, I had to do myself. And it made me appreciate things even more because people don't realize how life really is. And let me tell you I live it every day of my life. Little things that we take for granted. I don't take anything or anyone for granted."

One of the reasons Holton outshines other schools is the involvement of its parents who represent a broad spectrum of our culture. At about the time an oil company, through greed and carelessness, jeopardized the very health of the Gulf of Mexico, two Holton Moms planted the seed of an idea that somehow lessened the blow from what would become our country's worst environmental disaster. The project, which was the brainchild of Susanna Raffentot and Ellen Shepard, would become known as The Dandelion. Many other parents volunteered and community businesses made donations. What was created is something that will be here long, long after every student now at Holton has moved on—gardens, an outdoor classroom and a veritable arboretum that compliments and nurtures the environment while teaching children and adults alike about all the green living things.



olanda Scott taught Holton students about beauty. She surveyed the classroom we were in, handily fielding questions as we talked. "These kids are artists

in the purest sense of the word," Rolanda said. "They make things because it feels good. They make things because it makes them happy. I've had a child come in here weaving who was angry at the world and he came up to me afterwards, which kind of surprised me, and he said, 'Thank, you Miss Scott.' And I said, 'For what.' And he said, 'I feel so much better now.'"

Not long after she started teaching at Holton, Rolanda discovered a lump on her breast. "I've been fighting breast cancer since 2002," she said. "It seems like forever. The kids have gone through seeing me with hair, without hair, partially grown hair."

Not long after the initial diagnosis, Rolanda heard a sermon. The Anglican priests asked his communicants to look out the windows at the blue, cloudless sky.


"Beautiful sky isn't it? Beautiful day, isn't it?" he asked.

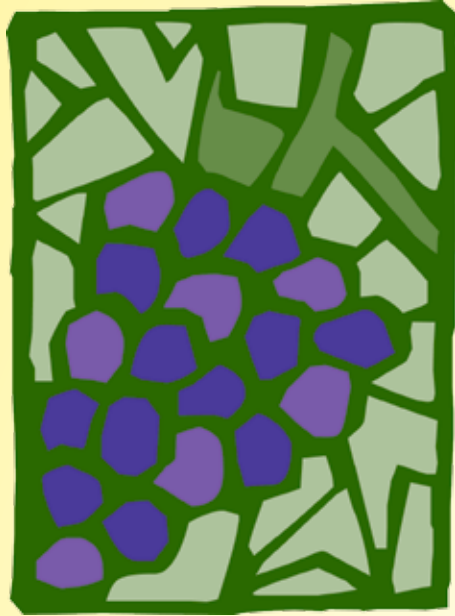
The listeners gave a unified nod. And then he said this: "Why me?"

"Every morning when I get up and look at the sky, I ask why me?" said Rolanda. "I know that I'm very fortunate to have a job like this where I can reap the benefits of the children's wonder without letting too many people know how much fun I'm having."

On July 6 a couple years later, Rolanda Iris Scott died. She had sculpted glass and young minds for years. My son Charles benefitted from her teaching for three years.

Rolanda was a patient teacher who treated every child as a rare vessel. She saw art in all things and taught her students to do the same.

Fourteen years ago Rolanda gave me a glass Christmas ornament the size of a pomegranate. Each year my kids and I carefully removed this singular ornament when we prepare to decorate our Christmas tree. This ornament has strength to it, but it is also fragile. Like us all. On its surface there are worm-like ridges dribbled on this sphere when it was molten and being given life by the breath of Rolanda Scott. Of all our many ornaments we treasure this one the most. And as we hang it I cannot help thinking that Rolanda's breath is sealed inside that glass bauble for all time, just as Holton Elementary School will remain in the heart and mind of my son for his earthly eternity. 



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BRIEFS

Rich's Stitches 25th Anniversary Gala Raises \$4,025 For Two Causes



ON SATURDAY April 20 from seven to midnight, more than a hundred people turned out to wish Chris

and Cecilia Rich a happy 25th anniversary for their well-known local business Rich's Stitches. There were victuals and spirits and goodwill and merriment and music and more than a little laughter. Food was provided by the Mill on MacArthur and the beer and wine came from Once Upon A Vine.

The twins utterly transformed the cavernous Samis Grotto into a perfect space for a catered party, which may cause the owners to consider better uses for this old movie theatre in the heart of Bellevue, which has been sadly neglected for years.

The Bellevue Merchants Association presented Chris and Cecilia with a plaque recognizing their 25 years in business. Mike LaBelle, president of the Bellevue Civic Association, helped make the event a success, according to the twins.

Cecilia and Chris even as they celebrated their own success with friends and family, were giving back to the community. The Rich girls held auctions—silent and vocal—that raised more than \$4,000, half of which went to Fetch A Cure in honor of their golden retriever, Cody, who died not long ago. The other half was presented to Samis Grotto. Individual Bellevue merchants donated gift certificates that were later auctioned off as packages.



Lakeside Avenue's New Signs

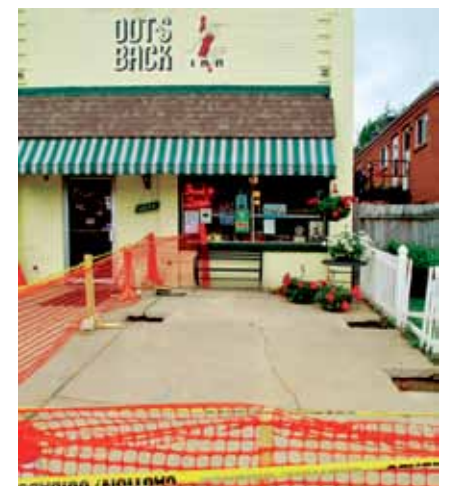
LAKESIDE AVENUE recently got two signs at either end of this blossoming commercial corridor. The signs are constructed of one-inch thick plate aluminum and cut by laser and painted jet black so they resemble cast iron. It's estimated they cost about \$10,000 each. More than 15 years ago the original design appeared on a pamphlet outlining proposals of what was then called the Lakeside Enhancement Plan, which ultimately led to the rebirth of this business district. Three years ago the Lakeside Business Association had the design refined and were preparing to have the signs made on their own, when Henrico County stepped in and funded the entire project.

Outdoor Dining Coming Soon To Dot's Back Inn

WORK HAS BEGUN ON

Dot's Back Inn new patio dining area, which should be completed in mid-June just in time for summer and outdoor dining. It's yet another improvement along MacArthur Avenue, and will help accommodate the ever-burgeoning crowds who, whether they live in the neighborhood or not, have come to make this dining destination their neighborhood cantina. Outdoor dining will be available at Dot's throughout the year—when the weather gets too cold, clear vinyl shades will be lowered and heaters fired up. "You know this is something a lot of people have

asked about and it's a project that I've been working on for close to four years—outdoor dining," says Jimmy Tsamouras. "It's about fixing up MacArthur Avenue and making the whole strip look nicer. We have this huge concrete slab in front of our restaurant so why not utilize it." **NJ**



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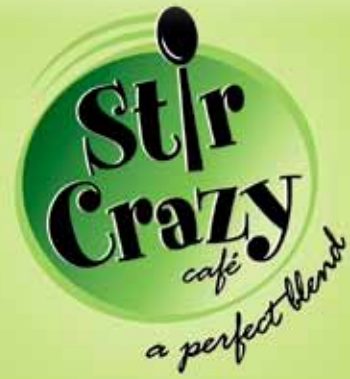
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Wed., Dec. 11, 2013

Richmond, Virginia

Goals, Updates & Accomplishments

HeartFields Assisted Living Like Living In The Jefferson

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

SAM BROWN, the concierge at HeartFields Assisted Living, greets everyone who enters the building while she mans the phones and answers questions from residents and visitors alike. She has an easy manner, this Sam Brown, and is a careful listener with the ability to solve problems even before they occur. As Jeremy Young, HeartFields' marketing director, enters the reception area, he says: "Sam is the eyes and ears and everything of this place. She's a very calming presence."



HeartFields concierge Sam Brown.

When you enter this elegantly appointed six-story building on Allen Avenue in the heart of Richmond's Fan District you can see Lee mounted on Traveler just to the south and a deep green awning caps the entrance below the white marble block that bears the legend SHENANDOAH, which was the original name of this luxury apartment building which opened in the very early years of the 20th century.

At the time the Shenandoah was constructed, much of the area was covered in tobacco fields, the Fan had not yet been fully laid out and there were few houses in the vicinity. In short order the homes were built that makes this one of Richmond's hallmark neighborhoods.

"The residents who come here love it and a lot of them had lived in the Fan their whole lives, or worked in the Fan and they want to stay where they know and it's a safe area right off Allen Avenue," says Jeremy.

In all there are 55 residences at HeartFields, all assisted living. On staff to insure the comfort and well-being of the residents there are nursing assistants, licensed practical nurses and medical technologists and they work around the clock. "Twenty-four seven, three sixty-five," says Jeremy.

We walk through the private dining room which is filled with cloth draped tables. "During the fall and spring, when the weather is nice, we have beautiful outdoor seating as well," Jeremy tells me. It's like an outdoor bistro and the residents absolutely love it.

Each of the apartments here features its own full bath along with a refrigerator. The deluxe apartments include large bay windows with stained glass accents that giving sweeping views of the Fan. Microwaves can also be used in the rooms, but only if the executive director signs off on it.

During the course of the interview Jeremy frequently reminds me that the residences here are more than apartments. "The thing I try to impress on people is that these apartments are their homes," he says. "The rooms can be painted any color they want. They bring in their own furniture and artwork and make these places their own. We're also pet friendly. Moving from independent to assisted living can be a very traumatic transition. And we try to make it as easy as possible."

We visit several of the apartments and each one is a perfect example of historic preservation where contemporary amenities merge seamlessly with architectural detail. "It's an old but charming building that was painstakingly renovated," says Jeremy. "There's a lot of rich history here." So rich, in fact, that HeartFields is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since the massive renovation of the old Shenandoah back in 1999 HeartFields has consistently won kudos as a premier senior assisted living retirement community.

Which is no wonder since HeartFields Assisted Living at Richmond is owned by Five Star Senior Living, a national healthcare and senior living provider. This company consistently goes above



Above: HeartFields at Richmond, inset: a deluxe apartments featuring a bay window.

and beyond government requirements and offers a long list of special services, along with flexibility, choices, and a variety of funding options, including a rent-based pricing structure with no up-front buy-in fees required.

Jeremy says this community offers five different levels of care. "Residents are assessed as to what level of care best suits them," he says. These levels can include personal care such as dressing and grooming, monitoring of health, safety, and overall well-being, coordination of outside health care providers, assistance with medication, companionship, and more. The objective is straightforward enough: giving assisted living residents the opportunity to live in their own private apartment with the support and services they need, while allowing them to be as independent and active as possible.

HeartFields also offers short-term stays—a minimum of 30 days—for seniors who need care after a hospital stay, or when family members travel out of town or simply need a short respite break from the stresses of caregiving. And short-term guests

enjoy all the amenities of full-time residents from housekeeping services and dining, to community activities and transportation, as well as coordination of any necessary medical care and help with daily living activities.

Activities abound at HeartFields. There are exercise and wellness classes, art programs, group games such as Bingo, religious services and weekly outings aboard HeartFields own bus.

We walk through the main entrance out onto the sidewalk on Allen Avenue and Jeremy folds his arms and looks up, his eyes climbing the six stories of the old Shenandoah.

"What I say every day is I work in their home," Jeremy says. "I don't come to an office every day. I work in their home and that needs to be respected. I like to think that our residents live in a beautiful hotel so it's similar to living in the Jefferson every day." **NE**

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RAINBOW MINUTES

Isadora Duncan Reinvents Dance

ISADORA DUNCAN WAS BORN in San Francisco in 1877. She took to dance as a youngster.

Finding ballet too rigid, she developed her own style, dancing barefoot in simple tunics with long, colorful scarves. As a teenager, she performed in Chicago and New York, but truly began captivating audiences after taking to the stage in Europe at the turn of the century. She became heralded as the Mother of Modern Dance.

Her personal life raised eyebrows as well, as a bisexual, socialist and advocate of women's rights.

She exchanged affectionate letters with poet Mercedes de Acosta during a lengthy affair. Duncan once wrote, "Mercedes, lead me with your little strong hands and I will follow you—to the top of a mountain. To the end of the world. Wherever you wish."



A Rainbow From Sea to Sea

IN 2003, GILBERT BAKER, THE creator of the original rainbow flag back in 1978, was commissioned to produce a giant rainbow flag for the 25th anniversary of the flag itself. Because hot pink was finally available for flag production again, the flag was restored to its original 8 colors for its Silver Anniversary unfurling. Those colors included hot pink, red, orange, yellow, green, turquoise, indigo, and violet.

Dubbed "Rainbow 25 Sea to Sea," the 16 foot wide flag, a mile and a quarter long, was displayed in Key West, Florida on June 15, 2003. Over 3,000 volunteers held the flag, which ran the length of Duval Street from the Atlantic Ocean at one end to the Gulf of Mexico on the other.

At the time, it was deemed the world's longest flag.

The Creators of Big Bird

IT TOOK TWO CREATIVE MINDS TO create Sesame Street's Big Bird. Jim Henson provided the sketch and Kermit Love designed and constructed the 8-foot-2-inch Big Bird costume. The bird was covered in turkey feathers, dyed primrose-yellow, which were attached upside down to give him a slightly ruffled appearance.

Kermit Love devised a mechanism that allowed Big Bird to drop a few feathers at will. Sometimes, he even

appeared on Sesame Street playing Willy the Hot Dog Man.

Since Big Bird became one of the world's most beloved children's characters, he earned a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1994.

In 2008, Kermit Love died of congestive heart failure. He was survived by his partner of 50 years, Christopher Lyall.

Big Bird, of course, lives on. 

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Little House Green Grocery

The Miracles Of Food

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

THE STOREFRONT windows of the newest addition to Bellevue Avenue's commercial strip are wide and tall and clear, and bear the legend Little House Green Grocery, which seems to hover in front of a clean well-organized interior space with black-and-white tile floors.

Commercial strips are organic by nature. Years and years ago, I'm told, a total of three grocery stores lined Bellevue Avenue, but they've been closed for decades now and their absence has always been keenly felt. One of the most important components of any retail district is a grocery store because it literally feeds the neighborhoods surrounding it. And now North Side finally has what it's sorely missed for years, and it's not your average, run-of-the mill grocer. Here you can buy foods that are all healthful and by so doing support our local community of growers and food artisans of every description.

Inside the space is bright but not blindingly so. Everything is white from walls to shelving, clean and minimal to better show off the produce and pantry staples. It does not crowd you in and it's easy to find exactly what you're looking for at a glance, thanks to the extreme care for order here.

"We are a neighborhood grocery store with tons of local products and pantry staples so you can come in and get wonderful, fresh things for dinner every day," says Erin Wright, one of the owners. "We've already got a lot of regular shoppers and then we have people that come in when they're cooking for something special."

At that moment a man brings in a box of frozen taste treats made of fruit and other fresh ingredients. He works with King of Pops which is located on Dabney Road just a couple miles to the southwest of this grocery store.

"The idea here is twofold," Jessica Goldberg, co-owner of Little House,

tell me. "We are here to provide fresh food to the neighborhood, and to support local vendors that we have here in Richmond—farmers, bakers, people who raise animals." Then she adds, with a quick turn of the head, "And Popsicle makers."

Jessica gestures toward the freezer and the produce. "We have a relationship with that beef; we have a relationship with that spinach," she says. "I can tell you where everything comes from."

Erin nods and says, "The growers come in we get to talk to them. We've been to a lot of their farms. It is a very intimate relationship."

Not all of what they sell at Little House is produced by local farmers and food artisans, though a lot of it is. As we approach the dairy case, Jessica says, "Local yogurt, local milk, farm fresh eggs, local Kimchi, local cinnamon rolls, local quiche, local hot dogs and bacon; but then we have chicken sausage from far away because people wanted chicken sausage. We take in mind what the customer wants."

Even before their grand opening on December 15, Erin and Jessica sought out feedback from the neighborhood. Jessica holds a stack of questionnaires, small cards that asked residents what products they would like to see stocked in this grocery store. "We paid attention because we wanted our customers to know that this is their grocery store," says Jessica.

Erin points out a shelf lined with dry goods, many of which were selected because of the input from shoppers. "We listen to all requests," she says.

Shopping at the Green Grocery can be somewhat of an education. Both Erin and her partner know food well and they're passionate about it.

Jessica steps over to a case lined with packages containing a variety of dried beans, all by Rancho Gordo which operates out of California's fertile Napa Valley. These are heirloom beans, carefully cultivated and grown in limited quantities. Rancho Gordo set out to insure that these



heirlooms, many of which were on the brink of extinction, survived, and a number of these beans are actually direct descendants of the indigenous beans grown in North America before European conquest, and their taste and texture is unsurpassed. So as you eat these sapid packets of protein you are sampling what Native American Indians tasted more than 500 years ago. And in this way food becomes cultural heritage as well as physical sustenance.

"We want to introduce you to companies who are thinking good and doing great things," Jessica says. "Like Rancho Gordo which is really preserving a tradition of beans that are native to North America."

On another shelf, next to Agave syrup, which is imported from elsewhere, there are glass flasks of maple syrup, which is made right here in Virginia, out in Monterey, by the parents of a Bellevue resident.

The store throughout is peppered liberally with products made right here in Virginia. Like Pungo Creek Mills corn meal that is grown and ground over on the Eastern Shore near the village of Painter. This is the real stuff, Indian corn, the same thing the aboriginal tribes of Virginia ate and shared with Jamestown colonists. It's colorful corn—dark blue and yellow and russet and white—so the end product is not merely tasty, but polychromatic.

The owners are constantly on the lookout for new sources of good foods. If you haven't dropped in recently make sure you do so soon. The variety of products is increasing all the time. "Our product selection has expanded about fifty percent since when we started," says Erin.

Not long ago the pair began selling wine and beer, some of which is locally made, including wines from Cross Keys and beer from Hardywood, Full Nelson and Legend. "We also carry

gluten-free beer," Erin says. "We had requests for it."


Both these women are sensitive to the dietary needs and wants of their customers. "A lot of our customers are very health conscious whether they be vegan, whether they be gluten free, whether they be vegetarian, whether they be on a Paleo diet, you name it," says Jessica. "So we try to have a wide variety of things."

Little House also offers prepared food from Sticky Togogo. And virtually every Saturday and Sunday there are workshops or food tastings at the store. "May is full of gardening classes and food tastings," Erin says. "We're happy to showcase people and their expertise. We've got a compost class coming up."

The food tastings have become extremely popular. "We've had tastings of bulk fresh sausage from Sausage Craft, local artisan sausage makers, and those are a lot of fun and it smells great in here," says Jessica. In the not-too-distant future Little House Green Grocery will begin hosting wine tastings, according to Erin.

Nothing inside this grocery store is ever wasted, simply dumped into a trash receptacle, which seems consistent with the over-riding philosophy of the two owners. "All the food that we don't sell we donate locally to the St. Thomas Food Pantry," Erin says. "And we're going to start composting and our compost will go to the Dandelion Garden at Holton (Elementary School)."

"We just really love this community," says Jessica.


"We're part of this community," Erin says. "We wouldn't want to be anywhere else." 

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May/June



ARTISTS 2 AFRICA at Northside Artist Cooperative

Artists 2 Africa features recent works by local potter Carren Clarke-McAdoo and Baltimore artist Karen Buster. The pair travelled to Africa with other artists last fall, visiting Senegal and Gambia. Carren has a strong focus on geometric designs, emphasizing the beauty found randomly in imperfections and natural formations. On display through July 20. NAC Gallery, 3421 Hawthorne Avenue, is open Saturdays 11-5 or by appointment. (804) 404-2622.



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RED At Virginia Rep

Virginia Rep is currently running *Red* by John Logan. Winner of 6 Tony awards including Best Play, the show is about 20th century artist Mark Rothko and his struggles with a commission for the Four Seasons Restaurant in New York. Through June 16. Theatre Gym. www.virginiarep.org

For a complete Calendar listing, please visit: northofthejames.com



Pop Art And Beyond: TOM WESSELMANN AT VMFA

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts offers the first comprehensive North American retrospective of Wesselmann's work. VMFA is the only East Coast venue for this exhibition. Made famous by his *Great American Nudes*, Wesselmann reinterpreted the history of art and past definitions of beauty, seeking to canonize a new American beauty in bold color. Wesselmann continued to reinvent himself and produce highly original work long after the Pop Art movement peaked.

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