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has been an artist practically since birth. From the time her fingers could grip the ferrule of a paintbrush and guide it along a flat surface, Nico was painting. In those very early years she worked in water colors and gouache on rolls of brown packing paper, fabricating homages to Van Gogh. When she became a teenager Nico discovered oils, and a teacher of hers who saw her talent and obsession with the painted word gave her a book that would move her toward what she has become—a gallery artist and one of Richmond's leading muralists. It was an art book, and still sits on a coffee table in her home. It's about one of the grandest murals ever painted—the Sistine Chapel. *continued on page 12*

BEFORE THE BENCH



Todd DuVal, Esq.
McDonald, Sutton & Duval

Each month, Todd DuVal, who has been practicing law for almost 30 years, will answer legal questions you may have so you can make the best decision about your representation in court.

How will the sweeping changes made by Virginia lawmakers during the past General Assembly session affect the average citizen?

Traffic laws affect almost everyone, and some of the changes that have been implemented in that regard are remarkable. DUI convictions, under certain circumstances (first offense), still require a one-year license suspension, however, at the option of the defendant, that “restricted” license is essentially unrestricted, giving the defendant freedom to drive anywhere, any time, so long as the vehicle being driven is equipped with a functioning ignition interlock device for the entire year. Driving on a suspended license is still a Class 1 misdemeanor (carrying up to one year in jail), but the minimum ten-day jail sentence is no longer mandatory. Additionally, police will no longer be allowed to stop a vehicle solely for equipment violations (light out, broken windshield, etc.). This is very significant, since the majority of stops that began this way, led to arrests of drivers for license suspensions, possession of drugs, outstanding warrants, etc. Equally significant, along with the slow roll towards the complete legalization of marijuana, the police will no longer be able to search a vehicle or person based on odor of marijuana alone. This is also very significant since a large proportion of searches prior to this change originated from probable cause developed solely from odor of marijuana. Also of note (though this change was enacted last year), a Virginia driver’s license is no longer subject to suspension for failure to pay fines and costs. Previously, if these assessments were not paid on time, your license would be administratively suspended, and notice of that suspension would be mailed to the address on the license (which was often outdated), leaving drivers unaware that they were suspended, and nonetheless subject to prosecution because of the paperwork that no one reads when you get a ticket or other conviction which had an acknowledgment of Notice if assessments were not paid.

Despite these changes, there are always nuances and exceptions to every rule. If you are stopped and subsequently ticketed or worse yet, arrested, your first call should be to your attorney, who will be able to help you sort out any defenses that you may have.

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COVER IMAGE: *Photograph by Rebecca D’Angelo*

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STREET SMARTS

Parklets on MacArthur Avenue

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

PARKLETS ARE coming to Bellevue!

And elsewhere in the Northside, and throughout RVA.

Parklets create a more pedestrian- and bike-friendly environment. They're sort of like communal front porches that invite neighbors to congregate in a public space. What's more, parklets allow local restaurants to increase outdoor dining opportunities. They've been a great success in progressive cities from Savannah to San Francisco, and they add a European flair to the streetscape.

One of the very first ones in Richmond will soon appear on MacArthur Avenue in front of Stir Crazy Café.

Although Richmond's parklet program began in 2016, it was until the pandemic struck that business owners began applying for permits.

"It's sponsored by the City of Richmond, and any city organization can apply for it," says Vickie Hall, co-owner of Stir Crazy. "It basically takes up an existing parking space." Business owners can either have a parklet custom-made, which requires them to follow very stringent design and construction guidelines; or they can apply for a pre-fabricated model through Venture Richmond.

"I'm working with Venture Richmond on our parklet," Vickie says. "It takes up fourteen feet and a typical parking space is twenty feet. And they are not permanent structures. If they need to be taken up for road maintenance or a special event, it's easy to pull those up. The city has already said they want the communities to enjoy them, but if we find the parklets are just not working out, they'll come back and take them out."

Vickie is one of the lucky four businesses citywide who will receive a pre-made parklet.

"We have four pre-fabricated parklets, and only one is available for MacArthur Avenue," according to Max Hepp-Buchanan, Venture Richmond's director of riverfront and downtown placemaking. "But we've had dozens of requests for them."



Parklets in San Francisco and Savannah.

An informal poll of restaurateurs on the east side of MacArthur suggests that the idea has great appeal. Amy Foxworthy of The Mill on MacArthur is already looking into having a parklet installed in front of her business. There's a possibility that a continuous line of parklets might run from Stir Crazy all the way up to The Mill.

"MacArthur Avenue might want to push for what we call a streatory," says Max. A streatory is simply a number of parklets adjoining one another in front of a row of restaurants.

"It's a great neighborhood for this kind of thing," says Vickie. "It's for public use, so it's nothing specific to just one business. Anyone can use it. You could bring a sandwich from home and sit out there with your family and eat if you wanted to, or just sit and chat and talk."

"The only hesitation I've heard is that

it's going to be taking away some parking spaces, and I know that's a premium around here," Vickie says. "But I think the positives outweigh the negatives."

It has been suggested that a lease arrangement with the owners of the apartment buildings on the west side of MacArthur Avenue could afford the parking spaces that the parklets would eliminate.

"I'm cool with parklets," says Third District Councilwoman Ann-Frances Lambert. "But then again in places where the parking is limited I just don't know how that will look. It just depends on the area. I think MacArthur Avenue is wide enough to do it."

It's good to keep in mind that parklets are not permanent.

"Let's just try it," Max Hepp-Buchanan says. "If people don't like it, we can remove it." 

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The Mill at Ten: Always Evolving

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

LAST MARCH, WHEN the pandemic began shutting down the economy, local restaurant owners had to restructure the way they do business. On March 18, Amy Foxworthy, one of the owners and founders of one of Northside's most popular eateries, locked the door at The Mill on MacArthur.

"We didn't reopen until the end of May," Amy told me last June. They used that time to do a deep-clean along with repairs. "We did this partly so we could stay active, and also so that a few folks who were struggling to get any kind of unemployment could make a little bit of money in the interim until we were able to reopen," said Amy last spring.

It was during that period too, that Amy, along with her business partners and staff, reconfigured the way The Mill operates. "We went ahead and switched up our point-of-sales system to allow for an online ordering platform so that folks could do curbside pickup, and order and pay online instead of coming in," Amy had said. "It's lovely that people are excited about what we're doing. It's still all very hopeful."

A little under a year later, I'm sitting at a respectful social distance with Amy at The Mill's bar. It's about 10:30 in the morning, and Amy is on the move from the front of the house to the back of the house. They're putting together a large order, and she's making sure everything's packaged just right.

With a final run to the kitchen, Amy returns with four large paper bags filled with 24 meals. The patron, who has waited patiently with her mask on, goes through a check list to account for all 24 lunches. Once that's done, Amy returns to the bar, and begins at the beginning, after I mention The Mill's anniversary.

"Ten years ago," she says. "I can't believe it. It was me, Josh Carlton, and Chip Zimmerman, and we're all still partners."

At that time, Josh and Chip were co-owners of Mojo's Philadel, and Josh, who lived in the Northside, thought a restaurant in Bellevue would do well. Amy joined the duo, and they pooled their resources to open The Mill.

"We wanted to be family-friendly, that was key," Amy tells me. "We both had young children at the time, and we

wanted to create a place where you could go out and dine with your family. We also wanted to keep it neighborhood-friendly. We thought that we could do something that complemented our restaurant business neighbors." At the time, the only other restaurants on MacArthur Avenue were Dot's Back Inn, Zorba's and the now-defunct Tastebuds. "Now we have even more restaurant neighbors who are killing it and doing a great job, like Demi's and Mi Jalisco and Stir Crazy," Amy says. "And everyone has their own vibe and their own niche, and that's kind of what it was about from the beginning."

From the start, The Mill distinguished itself as a restaurant with an abundance of locally sourced food, along with a menu that appealed to a variety of palates and dietary needs. "We added a lot of vegetarian dishes to the menu," Josh had told me a decade ago. And Amy had said, during that same interview, "As soon as we opened, the trend toward gluten-free started so we've tried to adapt."

The Mill still uses a lot of locally sourced products, and it's become less challenging to find the appropriate providers. "Over the years we've seen more and more people starting businesses that cater to restaurants which make it easier and easier to source local things without even having to even think about it," says Amy. "Even the big food providers like US Foods and Performance Food Group provide a lot of local stuff because it makes sense to them—less transportation costs. So it's way easier across the board."

When they initially opened, the dining room was secondary. "We really thought we were just going to be a pickup joint with delivery," Amy remembers. "Then we found out very quickly, within the course of a couple of years, that people just wanted to come in and hang out and dine in. It's a cozy little space that people seem to appreciate, which unfortunately hinders us right now."

Later this spring, if all goes well, diners will again be able to eat in that "cozy" setting. "We're hopeful that by mid-May we will have some indoor seating," says Amy. "That's why we're slowly starting to ratchet it up. Our biggest problem is that we could only really seat three to four tables based on the social distancing guidelines. Regard-



less, we're hoping to do half capacity by mid-May."

In the interim, they continue with curbside pickup and delivery only. "For delivery we partner with Grubhub, Uber Eats, and Chop Chop, which is local to RVA," Amy says. "We do a lot of catering as well. We do a box lunch program which we will deliver ourselves as part of that service because it's a pre-order so we can schedule that ahead of time."

Despite the struggles of the past year, there does seem to be light at the end of the tunnel. "Business is starting to pick back up again, which is lovely," says Amy. "And throughout the pandemic we have had loyal customers."

Like other restaurant owners throughout the city, Amy is interested in applying for a "parklet" outside The Mill, which would allow for more outdoor dining. "I would absolutely love some more seating outside," she says. "We're very limited with our sidewalk space, and just being considerate neighbors we can't take over the entire sidewalk, so the idea of the parklet is very exciting for the entire street."

Since its birth, The Mill's menu has changed somewhat. "There are definitely things that have come and gone," says Amy. "But the Heartland Grilled Cheese is still here, the Bellevue BLT is still here as well as the Mill Burger. There are a number of things that have been here since the beginning including the Northside club, and we've definitely evolved with our gluten-free and vegan options."

Having been a fan of The Mill since it first opened, our family has always loved their food from one visit to the next, and their service is always impeccable. "We try to keep it all consistent," says Amy.

She considers her staff, some of whom have been with The Mill for years. "We have Carrie Bell, who has been with us since the beginning, and a number of folks in the kitchen who have been with us for six-plus years," she says. "Unfortunately, this year we did lose a few people to moving away or moving on to other jobs. I think that happened to a lot of restaurants during the pandemic."

Amy is a realist, and she wants customers to understand that The Mill will reopen, but things will be slightly different.

"My fear is that people are going to want The Mill from 2019, and it just doesn't exist in the same way anymore," she says. "I know that people are expecting for us to go right back to what we used to be, and it's just not going to be exactly the same."

As pragmatic as she is, Amy is also optimistic. Change is ultimately a good thing, as hard as it might be to adapt to at first.

"This year has definitely changed us and everyone else to a certain extent," Amy says. "It made us reevaluate everything. It made us find better systems, find ways to simplify and to move forward."

She considers her own words, reflects on the history of this exceptional restaurant on MacArthur Avenue that she and Chip and Josh dreamed up and gave substance to a decade ago.

"It's definitely an evolution and has been since the day we first opened," says Amy Foxworthy. "You've got to look at it all as growth." **NS**

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Thirteen Acres: A New Use

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

THE FATE OF ONE OF the oldest structures in the Hermitage Road Historic District (HRHD) is in the balance. It stands alone behind Linwood Holton Elementary School, ringed in six-foot high hurricane fencing like a post-insurrectionist US Capitol. Not long ago, Union Presbyterian Seminary demolished an historic building that was also architecturally unique, and one of Northside's oldest structures, the first section of which dated back to the early 1800's. The Hunter McGuire cottage was reduced to rubble in the comparative blink of an eye. Regardless the reason for razing the structure, it was an important part of Richmond's history.

The brick farmhouse that sits behind Holton Elementary was built in 1885, making it the second oldest house among the forty-or-so homes that make up the HRHD. It's a handsome structure, featuring a broad wrap-around porch, wide eaves supported by decorative dentils, four chimneys, and a hipped roof of slate.

For decades it has been referred to as Thirteen Acres—and there's reason for that.

Way back in 1967, the house and its accompanying thirteen acres (the land now occupied by Holton Elementary School) was sold to the City of Richmond for \$475,000 by the Virginia Methodist Home for the Aged, which operated its facility there. Richmond Public Schools (RPS), at that time, planned to build an elementary school there, but there was fierce opposition from the adjoining neighborhoods. They argued that the location was too close to the dense traffic along Laburnum and Hermitage, and children might be hit by speeding cars. Which, incidentally, is still a concern today.

For the next four years, the old house served as a school for children with special needs. Then, from 1973 until 1978 the building became home to the RPS community relations department. In 1978, RPS proposed using the site as a residential school for adolescents. The surrounding communities—Rosedale, Bellevue, Ginter Park—were vehemently opposed to the proposal, but two years later Thirteen Acres opened a five-day residential program for emotionally



disabled students, ranging in age from six to twelve. It continued as a residential school until 2007, eight years after Holton Elementary School first opened its doors.

Another note of interest: during the Second World War, Thirteen Acres was home to one of the largest Victory Gardens in Richmond. That victory garden lasted for the full duration of the war.

Since the time RPS vacated the property, the building has fallen into a state of disrepair. The paint is peeling, exposed wood rotting, and window panes have been shattered and dentils pried loose from the fascia boards. For the past couple years, neighborhood kids have made their way into the school, slapping on a little graffiti, hanging out, and, in at least one instance, starting a fire on the second floor, which was about the time the hurricane fence went up.

So what should the city do with this old building?

"Our primary goal is to retain the building to prevent it from being demolished," said Bob Balster, president of the Hermitage Road Historic District (HRHD). "That building is a contributing structure to our designa-


tion as an old and historic district. So losing that structure could conceivably imperil our designation as a historic district. How many buildings can we lose in Northside?"

There have been a number of proposals about what to do with the old Thirteen Acres building. One of them is moving the structure to a parcel fronting Hermitage Road. "Because we are a district whose primary characteristic is a series of single family dwellings, we would like to see that building convert back to its original use as a single-family dwelling possibly after having moved it to face Hermitage Road," says Bob Balster. "We have historically opposed converting single-family residences to things such as doctor's offices or Airbnbs and the like. We've been pretty rigorous in defending the residential character of the neighborhood because once you lose these old residences they just don't come back."

About ten years ago former Holton Principal David Hudson suggested the old Thirteen Acres building be used an ancillary structure for classrooms to accommodate the burgeoning student population at the elementary school. "We put together a proposal to get it as a school for humanities during the reg-

ular school day," David told me. "And then to use it for the extended, after-school programs in the afternoons."

Third District Councilwoman Ann-Frances Lambert said recently, "I really like the idea of about it being used for after-school program. I'll schedule a ZOOM call and ask the people what they want Thirteen Acres to be."

Kenya Gibson, Third District School Board representative, definitely wants the building preserved and put to use. "The property has been sitting vacant for over a decade, so first and foremost it's time to do something," she said. "As for my preference. I went to architecture school so I'm always going to sit on the side of preserving a building with historic value like Thirteen Acres. So I really hope that whatever happens, the building itself can be preserved. Beyond that, I'm open to suggestions that the community has about the space, but of course as a board member and a parent I think that given its proximity to Holton, and ideal use is something that really complements the activities that are happening in the school. It's been over a decade, it's time to do something, and it's important to preserve the historic fabric of our community." 

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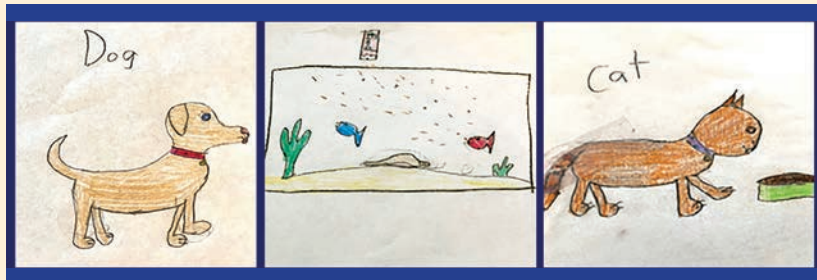
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WHAT'S NEW

Ms. Bee's Juice Bar Here's to Your Health

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



MS. BEE'S JUICE Bar on Brookland Park Boulevard, which opened two months before the pandemic struck, never missed a beat, and what's more just established its second location in downtown Richmond at The Valentine.

"I've been in business for just a little over one year," says owner Brandi Battle-Brown. "I wasn't even open a full year yet when I got my second location. I was blessed to open here about a year ago on the 25th of January. We never closed for the pandemic, which was a great thing, and I was actually honored to get my second location on December 14 of 2020. Our grand opening at The Valentine is April 5, and I'm very happy to get over there and service a lot of the people in the MCV community.

We're seated at a four-top table that hugs an exposed brick wall which is hung with paintings by a local, budding artist. This interior space has a honeycomb warmth to it, with the other walls painted a warm sun-yellow.

"When you go in a house, you know whether it's home or not when you first walk in," Brandi says. "People love the vibe we have; they feel like they're at home."

Brandi opened her juice bar for two main reasons. One was to provide healthy and tasty food options along with cold press juices, smoothies, home-brewed tea and other toothsome

delights, along with a host of add-on.

"So, I wanted to establish a healthy place to eat for low-income families, and I knew that they were in need of healthy options along the Northside corridor," Brandi says.

"But I also wanted to teach people that eating healthy can be good for you," she adds. "I engage with all my customers. I do education with my customers about what they should and shouldn't be eating. What's good for you, what's bad for you? Because food is medicine."

And her approach seems to be working. "I have a great customer base of people coming back in who tell me how much better they feel, choosing a healthier lifestyle," says Brandi. "It's very gratifying."

Support from the Brookland Park and the greater Northside communities has also been gratifying. "I have a lot of support from the neighborhood," Brandi tells me. "I also have an outpouring of support from the Metropolitan Business League, Black RVA, and the Jackson Ward Collective, so I'm very satisfied."

Brandi has a keen understanding of the Richmond market. She's been an agent for fourteen years now; and her mother, Leigh Battle, has been a broker for the past 42 years.

"I really feel like Brookland Park is going to be a baby Carytown," says Brandi. "And I couldn't have picked a better place for my business to be."

Brandi invites me to consider what she witnesses through her storefront

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windows every day. "A lot of people, when they get out on their weekend or weekday strolls, support all the businesses on Brookland Park Boulevard," she says. "They may get ice cream from Ruby Scoops. They may come here to get a smoothie and a bite to eat. They may go up the street to the Market to get bananas, or over to The (Smoky) Mug to get coffee."

Along with the food and beverages she serves ups, and the education she supplies, Ms. Bee's also offers on one of the most essential ingredients of a successful retailer. "We give the ultimate superb customer service here at Ms. Bee's Juice Bar," says Brandi.

It's something she has seen at North-side businesses on MacArthur Avenue in Bellevue. "I eat over there a lot," she says. "I love the Mill and Demi's and Dot's Back Inn. Me and the kids eat over there every weekend for brunch. They're small, they're personal and they have superb customer service. They feel homey."

Recently, Brandi signed a contract with Lamplighter. "They'll be carrying my juice products," she says. "I was ec-

static to know they wanted to carry my products in their store."

Sometime this spring, Brandi will install a parklet in front of her business with will allow for additional outdoor seating. A parklet is a small seating area running parallel to the sidewalk and taking up the width of a parking space.

Brandi also gives a lot back to her community. On Wednesdays during the summer, she offers free popsicles for the kids, but she does a lot more than that for our youth.

"I try to give platforms to coming up artists," says Brandi. She gestures toward the paintings on the brick wall behind her. "This young artist is only sixteen years old," she says. "She sells her items here at no charge. It encourages the entrepreneurial spirit." 

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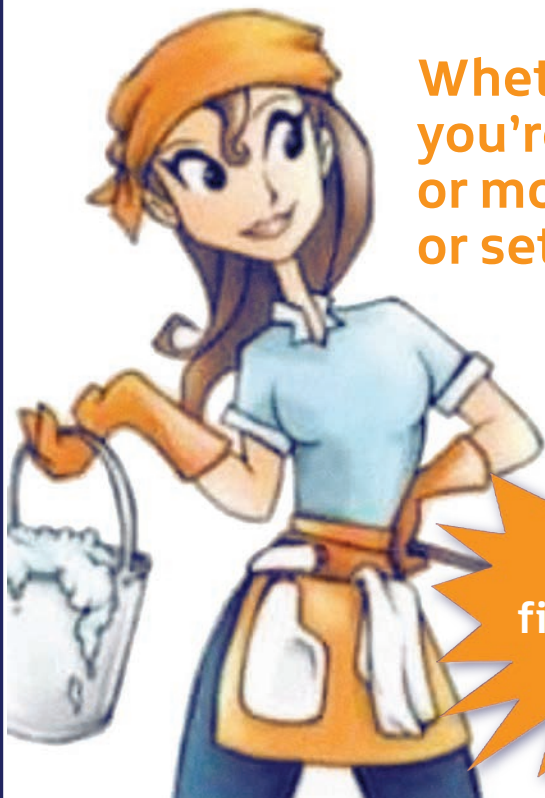
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NICO CATHCART

ART WITH PURPOSE

NICO CATHCART SITS AT A TABLE ON HER BACK DECK IN THE NORTHSIDE

just a stone's throw from the city line, but it feels as if it's way out in the country many miles removed from the urban discord. The yard is ringed in tall trees that have just started budding out, and everywhere there is the trill and warble and chirrup and cheep of a hundred birds seen and unseen in among a forest that seems intent on gobbling up this home and its plot of land. When I ask her why there are so many birds in her paintings and murals, Nico cocks her head slightly. "I use a lot of birds because of my hearing," she says. "That's how I realized I was going deaf; I couldn't hear the birds anymore."

W

E WATCH A PAIR OF house finches alight on the rail, and then suddenly take to flight. "I have a genetic condition that basically causes my cochlea to go bald, and what you hear is actually your brain interpreting little vibrations from these hairs in the cochlea and mine are just kind of falling out," she tells me. "It's probably been happening my whole life, but about ten years it started to be a huge problem, and it's going downhill a little bit more each year. My hearing will eventually lead to the point where I'm either going to need to just communicate through sign language, or get a cochlea implant."

Though Nico has only about 30 percent of her hearing left, she uses assistive technology and is a proficient lip reader—not a skill she studied, but something her remarkable brain figured out on its own.

"The vast majority of my work comes through studio works and murals," Nico tells me. "But I am also an advocate for women in the arts, and I'm an advocate for deaf people in the arts, so my work includes an element of activism in pretty much everything I do." And from the time her first memories were formed, Nico loved expressing herself through visual art.

by **CHARLES MCGUIGAN**



“I’ve been an artist my whole life, I knew what I wanted to do, I never had a questioning period,” she says. “I’ve been painting since I was five, so even back then I was going to school for art. I did not know that I would end up doing what I do now at that time because I didn’t realize that being a muralist was even a thing that happened anymore.”

When Nico was very young, her mother, Cindy, who worked as a graphic artist, gave her daughter a drafting table of her own and would bring her rolls of recycled brown packing paper. “And I would paint with watercolors and gouache,” she remembers. “I would copy other painters; that’s how you learn. I loved van Gogh. It’s bright, it’s colorful. I used to paint and try to replicate those brush strokes with gouache, which you can’t do. I’ve been obsessed with the great artists since I was a kid.”

By the time she became a teenager, Nico began working in oils, and she was fortunate enough to have a few instructors who could see her promise.

“I think every artist deserves to have a really great teacher when they’re young because that makes all the difference in the world,” says Nico. “I had two high school art teachers and a junior high teacher who were all amazing and they kind of saw something in me.”

One of them, who could see her unique talent and excessive drive, would give her something that became almost a guidepost on her path to becoming artist and muralist. “He saw something and he pushed me and he gave me a book of the Sistine Chapel,” Nico says. “I was probably fifteen and that book is sitting inside on my table right now. And I started learning about drawing figures by copying the Sistine Chapel ceiling.”

Born in Toronto, Canada’s most populous city and one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, Nico, in her teens at the time, moved with her family to a tiny town in central New York called Homer—a Schitt’s Creek sort of place. After graduating from high school in Homer, Nico went off to college to study art.

“I started at SUNY Oswego which is on Lake Ontario in northern New York,” she says. “I had an amazing set of young professors. I went there for four years, took a year off, and then went back to SUNY Courtland and did another four years. So I ended up with a double BFA in painting and ceramics, and a minor in art history.”

Even in college, Nico would show her work wherever she could. Which generally meant a bar or a restaurant. A high school friend of hers from New York had settled in Richmond, and he invited her

Opposite page: Oceans Rise, Empires Fall.

down for a visit. “He was in a punk band here in the 2000s when Richmond was a super punk town,” Nico says. “He had a punk house in Scott’s Addition. It was a dirty nasty place. This dude lived in the closet, but he got me a show at Mojo’s. I just came down with my super tacky naked ladies paintings and hung them on the wall.”

But she stayed for a week, and her love affair with Richmond blossomed during those seven short days. “We went down to the river, we went to punk shows,” she recalls. “We were biking around the city, going to Hollywood. And I was like, ‘This is the jam, this is the place.’ It’s when Scott’s Addition was still Scott’s Addition. No tall buildings. There was still a porn shop there. I used to walk from Scott’s Addition to the Devil’s Triangle to get a beer at Café Diem or Banditos and everybody make jokes about the bullet holes in the bar.”

And the rear façade of Bandito’s would become home to Nico’s first solo mural, one that features a skull. “It’s now on the Valentine’s historic registry and they interviewed me about it,” she says.

Nico readily adapted to Richmond. She joined the River City Rollergirls. “I was not a great blocker,” she says. “But I could go really fast. I grew up in Canada where they put skates on you the moment you can walk, so I’ve been skating my whole life.” One of her teammates named Alex was working with Art 180 at the time, which led to Nico getting a panel for the Street Art Festival, which then led to her being given an entire wall. “So I started painting murals because I’ve always been an ambitious person,” she says. “Everything is a hill to climb.”

The GRTC Street Art Festival opened up the world of murals for Nico. “I fell in love with painting murals immediately,” she says. “At that Street Art Fest I met so many amazing artists from all over the place. Like I had no business to be painting next to some of these people. They were already masters.”

It was there too that she met the man who would take her as a sort of apprentice under his enormous outstretched wings. “That’s where I met the

godfather of all muralists around here—Ed Trask,” she says. “Turns out our kids were in the same class together at school and we hit it off and he asked me to help him out with projects. I started helping him by filling in the backgrounds. I worked with him for a couple years. It was like being an assistant.”

Nico also worked with El Camino, who had a background in sign painting. “I learned about using long sign painting and pin striping brushes from him,” she says. “I was getting my chops.”

About three years ago, Nico struck out on her own. “I was completely separate,” she says. “And I have done a lot since then.”

When I ask if she has a favorite, Nico is reluctant. “They’re all like my children, they’re still my babies,” she says, then after a brief pause adds. “Cosmic Moxie is one of my enduring favorites though. It’s on Vitality Float Spa on Robinson, the floating lady. That was one of the first ones that made me.”

Every great work of music, of literature, of art is immune to the predilections of time and space. Whether

they were crafted in the time of the pharaohs or at the height of the Renaissance, whether they were made in Italy or in Istanbul, they transcend it all in a language that speaks to our universal eyes and ears and hearts and souls. This certainly holds true of the mural and gallery works of Nico Cathacart.

One her frequent themes revolves around Mother Earth. “I do a lot of work with climate change and the environment,” says Nico. “All my skull series are murals that are meant to talk about how we’re tied into nature. Everything that I do is trying to be intentional about talking about something that we really need to focus on. I think AOC is on to something with the Green New Deal. We need to talk about solar. We need to talk about implementing larger recycling programs because right now they estimate nine percent of what you recycle actually gets recycled.”

Weeks before COVID-19 struck, Nico went to Maui and visited a marine sanctuary in the clear waters of Honolulu Bay. She snorkeled and went on a snuba dive tour among the coral reefs. “It was an incredible ex-

perience,” she says. “We swam a half-mile out to this beautiful reef, along the walls of these coral canyons.” As far as the eye could see, there was nothing, not even a single house dotting the distant shore. “And in that pristine water below the surface there was plastic on the coral.”

Shortly after she returned, Nico was given a prestigious honor. “I got inducted into the Virginia Museum of History and Culture,” she says. “They did a project called agents of change and they recognized thirty woman who invoked real change in the state. So it was a big thing for me. I was the only visual artist. I was very humbled by it. We did this picture recreating a famous suffragette photo. The whole thing was because of the hundred year anniversary of white women getting the right to vote. You’ve got to say that because it was an uphill battle for a lot of people who weren’t white.”

“These changes are never overnight,” I suggest. “They are gradual. But you have to do what the civil rights leaders always said, ‘Keep your eyes on the prize.’ And what women suffragettes did. You keep moving forward.”

Nico nods. “What you said there is exactly why I do what I do,” she says. “Because all you can do is push forward. This whole conversation about climate change and those who deny it. I have to be out here painting things that bring attention to what is happening to our environment.”

She shows me a series of large blue panels stacked against her house. They were part of an exhibit held at Hermitage Museum and Gardens in Norfolk. Called “Unknown Outcomes,” it included the works of a number of artists, and focused on the evils human beings have unleashed on the Mother of Life, our oceans. Nico’s contribution, “Symbiotic Swim,” consisted of five massive eight-foot panels hinged together and expanded accordion-style.

On one side is a pristine undersea view of a variety of jellyfish rising elegantly; the reverse side features the same ultramarine ocean background, but in place of the sea jellies are the inelegant constructs of human beings—clear plastic bags, the sort that that you might get at one of the chain grocery stores or convenience stores or corporate pharmacies. One of them even displays a



“A Time to Rise”, collaboration with Austin Miles.



"Cosmic Moxie" residing on the side of Vitality Float Spa on Robinson Street.

yellow smiley face with the message, "THANK YOU HAVE A NICE DAY!"

One of the largest murals she ever painted is in Rochester, New York. Her mural covers one entire wall of Planned Parenthood building. "It's sixty feet tall with no windows and it's all about the control that women have over their bodies," she explains.

The central image is a massive head of an antlered Artemis. "Within the antlers is the lifecycle of a bluebird which is New York's state bird is a bluebird," Nico says. "And then there's a nest on one side and there are bird skulls on the bottom. It's the full lifecycle. And across the whole building is the full cycle of the moon."

We talk about the uprising that occurred last summer across America after the brutal murder of George Floyd. She mentions the Confederate monuments that were taken down right here in Richmond, and the only one remaining on Monument Avenue, the one of Lee, the base of which has been transformed into a piece of art. "I honestly don't want them to move that," she says. "I just want them to take the damned fence down." She considers the re-

moval of the other monuments. "It was like watching the liberation of a people," Nico says.

In the not-too-distant future, one of her murals will grace the north façade of True North Yoga on MacArthur Avenue in Bellevue. According to the owner of the yoga studio, the mural will reflect the diversity and inclusivity that define the Northside community. Although the entire mural hasn't been sketched out completely, it will include several elements. "There will be two women from the community," says Nico. "There will be a rainbow shape that's all in different blues and there will be peace lilies coming out of the side. And there will a hidden bird."

Many of her murals contain references to issues of social justice and the like. "My objective is to talk about issues that matter," Nico says. "So I like to talk about the importance of community and I like to talk about women's empowerment. And I like to talk about minority empowerment."

She mentions a collaborative piece she did with an image of Vice President Kamala Harris. "A glass ceiling has been broken," says Nico. "She's

broken that barrier. The next generation of young women will not have to think that that barrier ever existed, and I want to make work that makes women feel that way."

Nico gives me her take on the nature of art.


"Public art, and art in general, has always been a way to talk about complex issues in a way that transcends the complexity of it and reaches out towards the human condition," she says. "With a painting you can talk about something big and complex like plastic in the ocean or the rise in temperature of the ocean or a disabled person being unable to complete a task. You can make a picture about that and people will understand the complexities of it, and it's something you can do without words. Public art is the oldest art form. The first public art was scribbled on the walls of caves."

We talk into the late afternoon, and as the day warms up the birds become almost raucous, particularly three large crows arguing over the topmost branch of an oak tree.

"I will go back and bring it full circle, and talk about Michelangelo again—the theme in my damned

life," Nico says. She invites me to consider the Creation of Adam fresco painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the one that shows God's outstretched finger moving toward Adam's hand. Then, she reminds me of the curved pink space where God is stationed and surrounded by his heavenly host.

"He is literally in a human brain," she tells me. "It's a cross section of the cerebral cortex. It is so obvious what Michelangelo is saying in the middle of one of the holiest places in the world—man created god in his head. It is so subversive, and I love that as a public art piece."

And then she talks about a woman and her son, a three-dimensional piece by the same man who painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling. This one, of creamy white marble, depicts the Stabat Mater. "The Pieta is probably the most perfect sculpture that ever existed," say artist Nico Cathcart. "I'm not a religious person, but there is a transcendent feeling that happens there. It's so graceful, and it's insane to think that it's marble. Michelangelo just had to find the shape in the stone." 

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BRIEFS

HOBNOB Reopens With In-Person Dining

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

ON A WARM, sunlit evening at the crack of April, we were fortunate enough to experience in-person dining for the first time in more than a year at one of Richmond’s truly spectacular restaurants—HOBNOB. This favorite eatery in Lakeside closed its doors on March 15 when COVID-19 struck, but two days later they were open for business with a sort of contactless drive-through format, and they’ve been serving their eager diners ever since.

But there was something about being here again. We sat at a four-top in the restaurant’s newest addition, an expansive covered patio with socially distanced tables and chairs. Dining is also available inside the restaurant as well as on the open patio on the front of the building.

We started off with crab spring rolls, which are stuffed to the gills with sweet lump crabmeat and a shaving of carrots, and served with a sweet chili-garlic dipping sauce. The crabmeat is so fresh you can taste the Chesapeake. That was for starters.

Everything—and I mean every single aspect of every single dish—was perfection on a platter. We sampled the fresh, cornmeal-crusting fried oyster; the beer-battered cod and chips; salads; and the asparagus-mushroom farro. Complementing these savory meals, were extraordinary servers who made certain you felt as if you just stepped onto their backyard patio for a dinner under the darkening sky.

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Former Hermitage Grill owners John Meyers and Waller McCracken at a table on the front patio the evening of the reopening. A masked and aproned Tracey Thoroman, who, with his wife Kristin, owns HOBNOB, checks on his guests.



Hermitage Richmond resident working on his latest piece of art.

Spring Events at Hermitage Richmond

ARTS ON THE LAWN

Hermitage Richmond on Saturday, May 15 from 10 till 2 will host its first ever Arts on the Lawn as part of its On the Green series. This retirement community is committed to bringing a wide array of programs and events to its beautiful Northside campus. Residents, families, team members and the neighborhood are encouraged to attend.

Artists are invited to display their work on the lawn. Booths are available for a \$20 fee, which includes two parking spaces, and an eight-foot table and table cloth. A box lunch will also be provided for the artists.

Funds raised from sale of vendor space at Arts on the Lawn will go towards Hermitage Richmond's Opening Minds through Art (OMA) program. OMA is an evidence-based, intergenerational, art-making program that benefits people with dementia. Volunteers receive training and have the opportunity to work weekly with their assigned OMA resident. It provides a time for creative self-expression and social engagement for residents, and it's a way to improve understanding and engagement for volunteers.

BLESSING OF THE PETS

Join us for the Blessing of the Pets on Saturday, April 24 at 10 am on the front lawn of Hermitage Richmond. If you can't bring your pet, bring a photo of your pet. There will also be an opportunity to donate to a local pet shelter as well. This is a rain or shine event! 🐾

For more information about either event please call Catherine Chappell at 804 474 1807, or email her at cchappell@pinnacleliving.org

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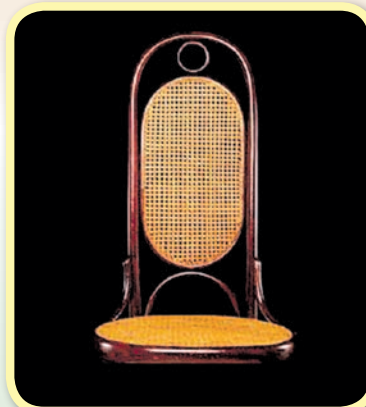
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ORIGINS

A Quarry Story

by FAYERUZ REGAN

QUARRIES sometimes hold secrets, so you've got to dig deep. Particularly if those quarries were once filled with water. That's certainly the case with the three quarries that once operated on the land that became Joseph Bryan Park.

Bryan Park straddles the Fall Line, and the granite found there was instrumental in building the roads in Richmond's early Northside developments.

Around the turn of the last century, industrialist Major Lewis Ginter quarried the dense Petersburg granite found between Jordan's Branch and Upham Brook on land that would eventually become the northwest perimeter of Bryan Park. Stonecutters transformed the granite into Belgian blocks and curbstones that would pave and line the roads in many of Northside's early developments.

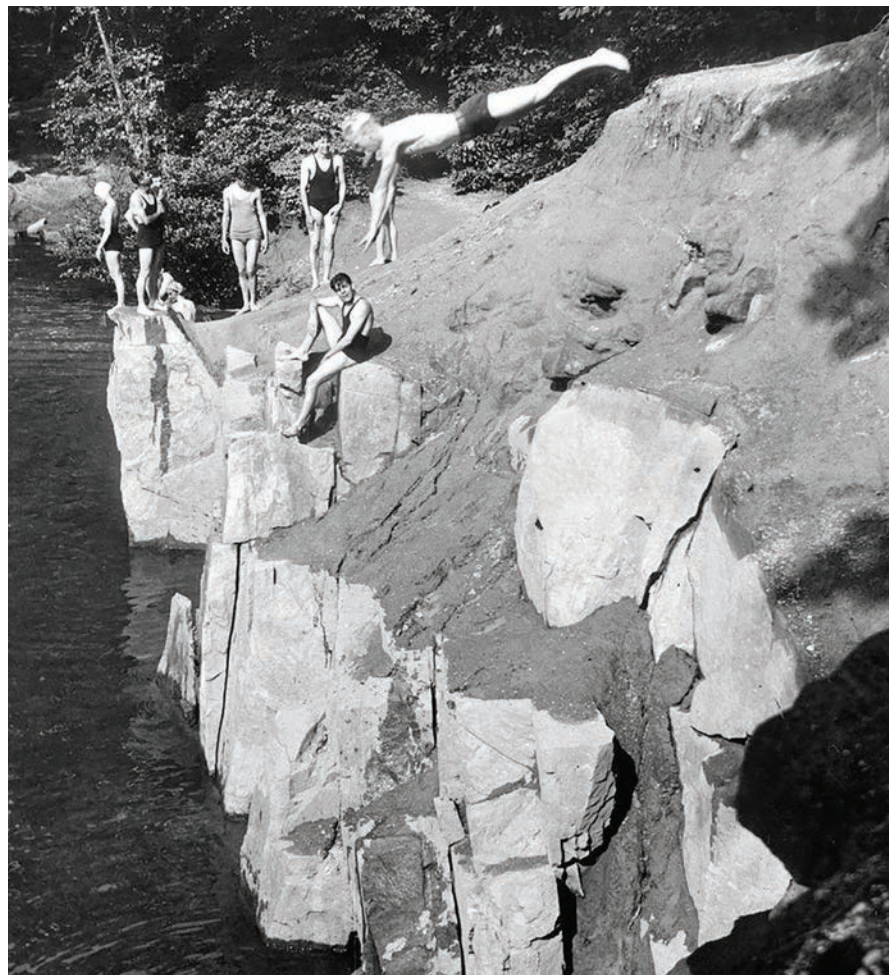
Back in 1892, Ginter built a narrow-gauge railroad system for the express purpose of hauling granite from his quarries at Young's Pond to his numerous construction projects peppering the Northside. He even purchased his own locomotive and named her Barbara.

Quarries frequently fill with water when underground springs are inadvertently tapped. Such was the case with the quarries at Bryan Park. Once filled with water, the quarries became popular swimming holes. According to a Richmond Times-Dispatch, the first drowning occurred in one of the Park's quarries in 1932. Nelsie Clark, a 27 year-old mother of three, apparently stepped off a granite ledge into deeper water and sank like a stone. There would be other deaths in the coming years.

As late as 1944, on Independence Day, 16 year-old Eldridge Anderson drowned at the site. It took twelve days for his corpse to surface.

More than corpses ended up in the water-filled quarries. Over the years, numerous cars had been driven into the quarries, whether stolen by teenagers for a joyride, or simply dumped there under mysterious circumstances.

The isolated location of the quarries



also seemed to invite crime. On June 6, 1951, a mother and daughter, seeking shelter from a rainstorm, accepted a ride from a motorist near the somewhat secluded quarries only to be robbed and sexually assaulted. They were treated at MCV for bruises and lacerations, and the mother was later admitted to a hospital for shock.

In article from 1940, Ms. A. T. Smith, who lived in one the few houses adjacent the quarries, said it was not unusual to hear men and women screaming, or shots being fired around the quarries at night. "In fact, it would be quite unusual if everything remained quiet," she said.

Authorities had been pressuring the owners to close the quarries, and use the land as a dumping site. Home Beneficial Life Insurance (the owners at the time) refused, citing "commercial possibilities."

Then on the evening of June 14th, 1940, Leroy McGruder and Lola Marie Strite, both 22, decided to go skinny-dipping at the middle quarry. Her clothes were found neatly folded beside the water, and his car was found parked nearby.

Roads were blocked for the nearly week-long search, but it didn't stop more than 500 onlookers from coming. Due to dangerous mining equipment and tangled cables at the bottom of the quarry, divers couldn't retrieve the bodies. Finally, the quarry was drained and the bodies recovered.

That July it was announced that the quarries would officially close, and that trespassers would be prosecuted to "the full extent of the law." Signs and gates went up, but the kids kept coming.

By the 1950s all three quarries had been filled. About the only evidence of their existence today are angular chunks of granite riprap just outside the western perimeter of the Park in the small residential enclave known as Shirley subdivision just off Byrdhill Road.

The three quarries were demolished more than fifty years ago. "When I-64 was being built (late 60s early 70s) blasting and construction for the ramp from I-95 South heading south and west to I-64 obliterated the quarries, due to the 'cut and fill' approach to highway planning," according to John Zeugner with Friends of Bryan Park.

The Magic of Love

by **FRAN WITHROW**

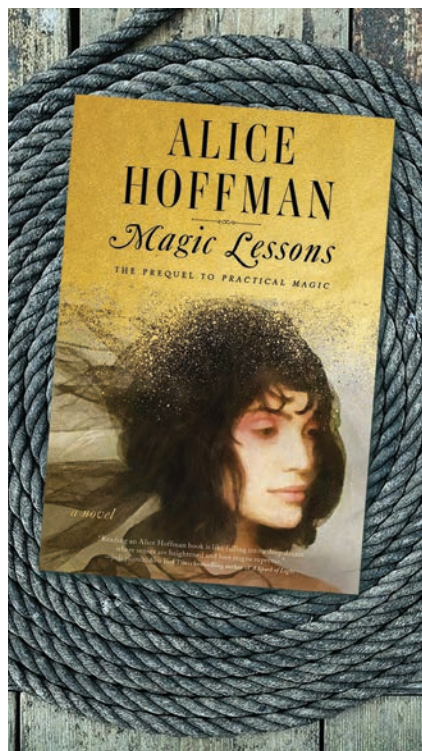
ALICE HOFFMAN'S genre is magical realism, and she is so adept at it one half suspects it is all true. This is certainly the case with her latest novel, "Magic Lessons," which is set in the 1600's during the Salem witch trials.

"Magic Lessons" is Hoffman's prequel to "Practical Magic," and I eagerly devoured it. Hoffman's writing is deliciously distinctive: characters move through her stories with a dream-like quality, wandering across the pages surrounded by nature. Bees hover nearby, snow falls softly, buds bloom into exquisite life. Hoffman paints the background for her stories seamlessly, and that's as mesmerizing as the stories themselves.

In "Magic Lessons," Maria Owens, abandoned at birth, is raised by a local healer and has special gifts herself. Maria eventually finds her birth mother and father, but they send her away to Curacao, where she is forced into servitude. There she meets a visiting American, the debonair John Hathorne. Hathorne charms the young girl and declares his undying love for her. She falls for him, only to discover one morning that he has gone back to America without her, and now she is pregnant.

Determined to find him, Maria sets sail for Salem, Massachusetts, along with her baby, Faith. On board the ship, she uses her healing skills to save the captain's son, Samuel, from a deadly disease. Samuel falls in love with her but Maria is sure that love, for her, will always be cursed. Oh, what a tangled web!

When Maria arrives in Salem, she discovers her beloved is married. Hathorne, appalled to see her, feels deep remorse over his dalliance with her. He decides to stifle his guilt by seeking to rid the town of anything that smacks of witchery. And why wouldn't he? Witches are unpredictable and powerful, and that makes many men uncomfortable. Maria is eventually arrested on suspicion of witchcraft and marched to prison while holding her precious daughter against her chest. Knowing she faces the gallows, she relinquishes Faith to a



local woman, Martha, who swears she will care for the girl and bring her to visit Maria in jail.

Instead, Martha runs away with little Faith, who grows up forced to hide her own magical gifts until finally she can bear it no longer, turns toward dark magic, and escapes. What happens to Maria, to the selfish and proud Hathorne and his meek little wife, to Martha and to Faith, is just fine writing. I didn't see how Hoffman could resolve all this in a satisfying way. Will Maria survive the witch hunt? How can she be with her true love when she is convinced their love is cursed? Is her daughter Faith doomed, since she is practicing dark magic for selfish purposes?

Interspersed throughout the book are magic lessons, references to herbs and remedies, and recipes for drinks such as Courage Tea, which I long to have in my kitchen.

If you have read Hoffman before, you know that love always wins.

And that is just practically magic. 

Magic Lessons
By Alice Hoffman
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HIDDEN HISTORIES

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882: Yee Shun, and the View From Gold Mountain

by JACK R JOHNSON

GOLD MOUNTAIN!

That was name the Chinese laborers used for the American West during the Gold Rush when thousands of their countrymen streamed into the country, looking, of course, for gold, but also for work, which was in ample supply. In fact, most Asian immigrants never got rich from gold. Instead, after arriving on these shores, they worked as itinerant farm laborers and factory hands, cooked food, pressed shirts, and laid railroad tracks. Lots of them. Their labor helped to build one of the more magnificent accomplishments of 19th century American engineering—the transcontinental railroad system.

But the Chinese labor force was not welcomed by many white Americans, who felt threatened by workers who spoke a different language, practiced a different religion and were willing to work dangerous rail laying jobs for much less money. Labor unions such as the American Federation of Labor and Knights of Labor found them threatening and favored passing laws to prevent their immigration (The only American labor union that supported their right to work in the U.S. at that time was the Industrial Workers of the World).

The politicians of the day listened. By the 1880s, anti-Chinese sentiment reached its peak with the Chinese Exclusion Acts, a series of laws that restricted immigration from China and limited Chinese-born people's civil rights within the U.S. They were draconian to say the least—akin to laws used against Blacks in the same era. They suspended immigration for ten years, required Chinese people to carry documentation at all times, and refused Chinese people the ability to become naturalized citizens. They were not allowed to vote, and were not even allowed to testify in court because they were not “Christian”, and thus could not be sworn in. Consider: if you were Chinese in America after 1882, you could not even legally defend yourself in court if you were cheated in business dealings—a quite common occurrence.

But a little-known case, Territory of New Mexico v. Yee Shun would change



some of that. The case was about a disputed murder charge, a murder that occurred on the evening of February 24, 1882 when a 20-year old newly arrived Chinese immigrant, Yee Shun, stepped off a train platform in East Las Vegas, New Mexico. He was on his way to Albuquerque in search of a job, but, unfortunately, decided to make a stop in East Las Vegas to check in with a friend, Gum Fing. When Yee Shun walked into the local Chinese laundry to inquire the whereabouts of Fing, someone fired a shot. Shun ran out of the laundry. Inside, a man named Jim Lee (who was also known as Sam Ling King or Frank) had been murdered. A group of white New Mexicans saw him running and tackled him to the ground. Yee Shun was dragged to the local sheriff's office and arrested for the murder which he vehemently denied.

At the trial, Jo Chinaman, the laundry's owner, was called to testify. When he faced the judge, he was asked about whether he was Christian and whether he understood the court's oath. Jo Chinaman said that he was not a Christian and didn't understand the oath, but that he would tell the truth. Then he testified that Yee had killed Jim Lee.

According to Erin Blakemore, Yee was found guilty of second-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison. Following an unsuccessful appeal, a despairing Yee committed suicide by hanging himself with knotted together bed linens.

Yee Shun's life was tragic, but his legal case turned into a small victory for the rights of fellow Asian-Americans. During his lawyer's failed appeal, he claimed that Jo Chinaman's testi-

mony was invalid because he was “of the Chinese religion,” and so his oath could not hold up in court. But New Mexico's territorial Supreme Court judge disagreed. He upheld the conviction, and in the process established the precedent that Asian-Americans had the right to testify in court.

“Prior to Yee Shun, the legal right of Chinese to testify in court was unclear,” writes historian John R. Wunder. “The stumbling block was the oath.” The appellate court's acceptance of Jo Chinaman's testimony in court set a precedent that opened up the door for Chinese people to testify.

This hardly eradicated the anti-Asian sentiment that has flared up periodically in America culture. The Chinese Exclusion Act was extended for another 10 years in 1892, but it was eventually repealed by the 1943 Magnuson Act when China had become an ally of the U.S. against Japan in World War II. Later, on June 18, 2012, the United States House of Representatives passed H.Res. 683, a resolution introduced by Congresswoman Judy Chu that formally expressed the regret of the House of Representatives for the Chinese Exclusion Act.

And, finally, just last year, Yee Shun's landmark legal case has been memorialized with a public monument in New Mexico. Created by Seattle artists Cheryll Leo-Gwin and Stewart Wong, it was installed outside the Bernalillo County Courthouse in Albuquerque, N.M. on Jan. 11, 2020.

Its title is “View from Gold Mountain.” nwasianweekly.com/2020/01/view-from-gold-mountain

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RESTAURANT REVIEW

Brookland Park Market: A Neighborhood Gem

by ANNE JONES

AFTER ENDURING AN unthinkable year of extreme take-out dining, I was ready to try something new, and I remembered the many enthusiastic recommendations from several friends about Brookland Park, starting last fall.

First glance at the menu and I'm already impressed. Two big salads (beet and Caesar), several sandwiches, and five entrees for dinner. I'm happy there's not an overwhelming number of choices, and the descriptions sound like everything is a specialty. There's a fried chicken sandwich and a standard club, but also a vegan Gochujang Tofu Sandwich with vegan slaw and a garlic Gochujang marinade. Dinner entrees include the Rodeo Burger, General Tso's Chicken, and also a Tofu bowl, so something for everyone, including Northern Neck crab cakes.

As a semi-vegetarian, I was thrilled to see Truffled Mushroom Fettucini on the menu, dreaming it would be along the lines of one of my favorite dinners on the planet—the wild mushroom tagliatelle at Enoteca Sogno in Bellevue. I found out from Sean, one of the Market owners, that it was, in fact, inspired by that very dish. And it was every bit as delicious, but with a higher mushroom count, I'm pretty sure. The roasted shallots and mushrooms over fettucine were topped with a light truffle garlic cream sauce, emphasis on the “light.” This was no smothering heavy sauce, it was more a light drizzling of subtle flavors. The shallot and truffle merged exquisitely, and the overall effect was delicate and savory.

My friend who joined me for porch dining reported that his dinner of pork tenderloin was lightly breaded, perfectly seasoned, and thoroughly cooked, but not overcooked. He was mostly impressed by the tenderness of the cut. Accompanied by sauteed green beans that retained just the right amount of crunch, and the orzo with a cheesy sauce, it made for the perfect meal.

Now that I'd found a new favorite place, take-out sandwiches for a lunch porch party were next on the agenda. E's roast beef sandwich with fontina cheese and caramelized onions brings the Philly cheesesteak to a whole new culinary level. The ribeye steak used in this creation would water the mouth of any carnivore or omnivore—it is lean and it is succulent, and perfectly tender. The onions, slightly sweet, work in lovely conjunction with the Dijon mustard.

Stacked high with ham, turkey, bacon, cheddar cheese and topped with a dab of mayonnaise and layers of lettuce and tomatoes, M's club sandwich could easily feed two or even three. Both the ham and turkey are fresh, and that's the key to any successful club. I went for the mushroom fare at lunch too. Named Kevin's Mushroom Melt, this sandwich was just one cheesy celebration of flavors - pickled red onion that was more sweet than tart, mild fontina cheese, fresh salad greens, and a big fat mushroom on ciabatta bread.

Fries are listed on the menu as the only side—and a bag of fries is a large order. These are the best kind of fries—golden brown with soft interiors, and they call to mind the mainstay of Maryland and Delaware boardwalks, the legendary Thrasher's French fries deep-fried in peanut oil.

Brothers Sean and Pat Lynch, and Sean's wife Esha opened the Market last August, 4—five months into the pandemic, a delay from the originally planned spring opening. It is a true market, too, with a good variety of Italian staples and treats, and a large selection of wine and drinks. For hours and online visit brooklandparkmarket.com

So add Brookland Park Market to your list of take-out favorites and don't miss out on this neighborhood treasure. Brookland Park, Ginter Park, Bellevue, Rosedale, Highland Park—we're all Northside neighbors who will find something to love at this place. **NB**

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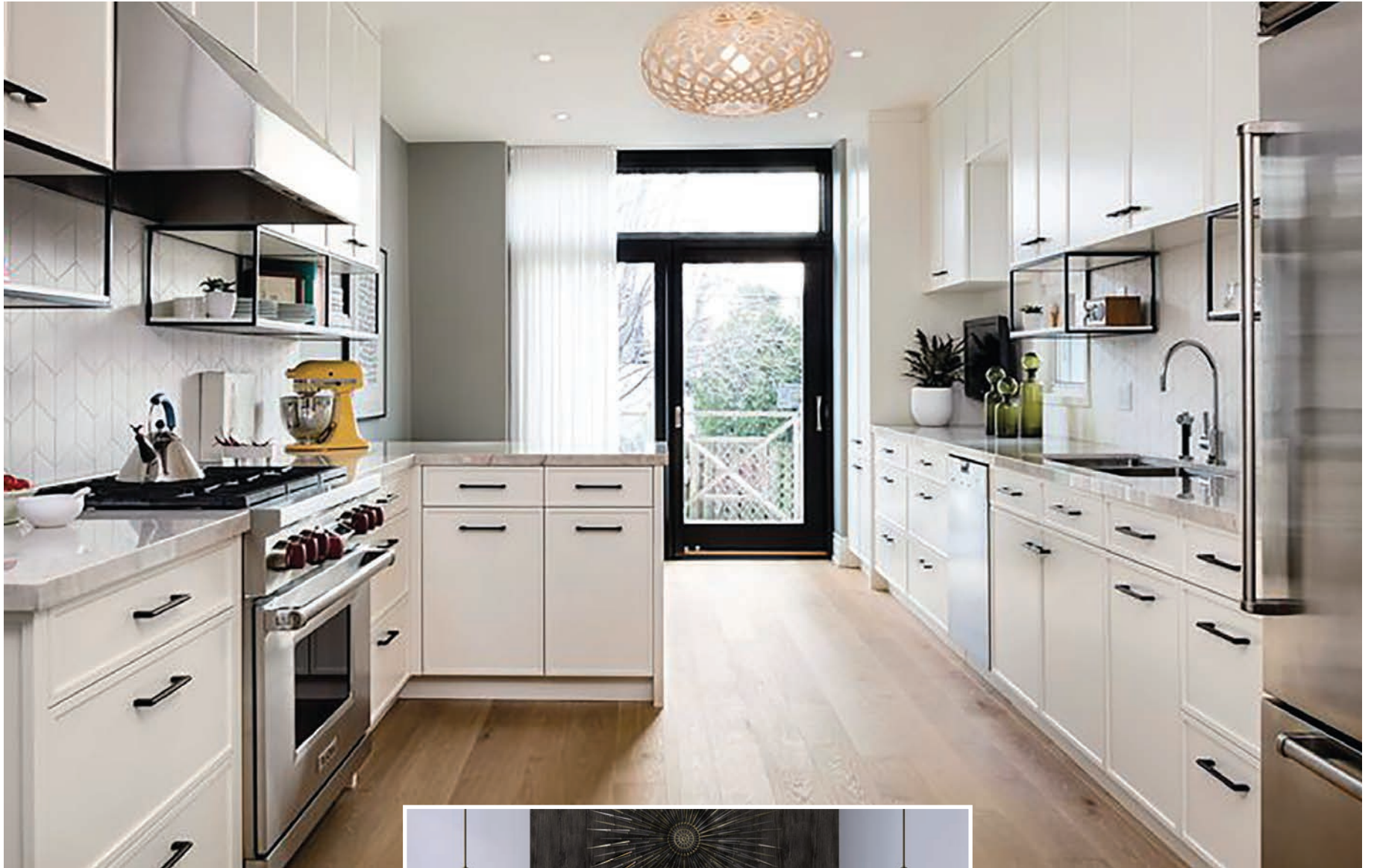
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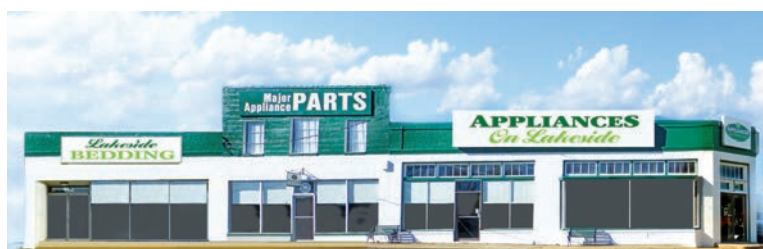


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