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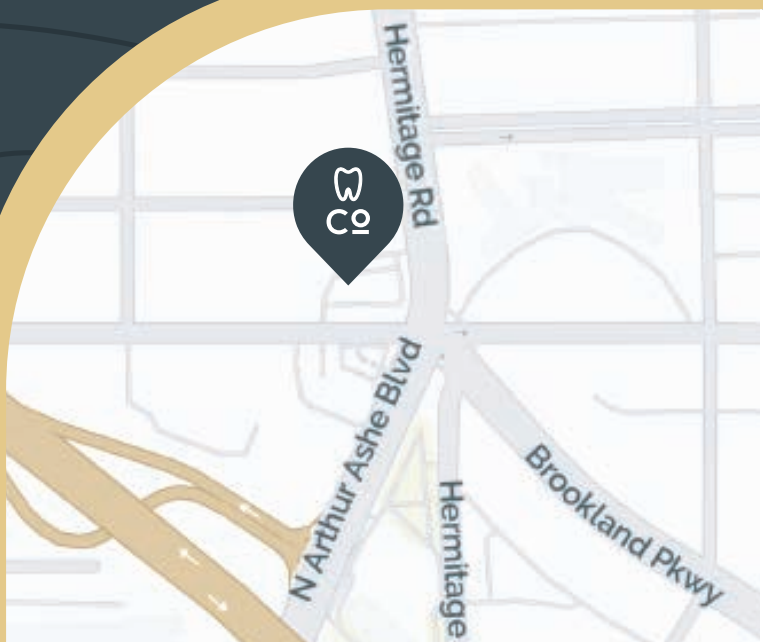
Lou Keeton is many, many, many things. She is an actor and a playwright, a model and a photographer, a digital producer and an artistic director. But she is also a story teller and a survivor of horrific abuses, and an advocate and a teacher. Lou also created The Whistle Stop Theatre Company in Ashland, a safe theatrical space that is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. And with everything else, she is also a kind and generous human being, who understands the human condition on a level that many people cannot fathom. Because Lou Keeton is also a genuine empath.

*continued on page 14*





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*Cover photograph by Lou Keeton*

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# Richmond Art Garage

## Where You Fill Up on Art

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

**R**ICHMOND ART Garage on Brookland Park Boulevard isn't like most other art galleries in town. For one thing the artwork comes primarily from emerging artists. What's more the prices are extremely reasonable.

"You can get a lot in here for a couple hundred bucks," says Zachary Reid, who owns the gallery with his wife, Jennifer. "You go into another gallery and you see something you like, and it's five grand. In here, you can get something for a hundred or two hundred bucks."

We walk through the gallery, which is divided into two main rooms. The walls are of exposed brick and there is an abundance of natural light streaming through a series of large bay windows. It's an intimate space tucked between Nomad Deli & Catering Company, and the old bank building. In a former incarnation the gallery was a service station and automotive garage.

"The objective was to create a gallery for emerging artists," he says. "We wanted a professional gallery experience for emerging artists."

In the front exhibit area, the gallery hosts a different show every month by younger artists who are already somewhat established. "And then in the back we have about fifteen emerging artists whose work we show," says Zach.

For many years Zach worked in the specialty magazine industry. He served as editor and writer for a local company that specialized in magazines devoted to collectors. "I used to be the editor of a Barbie doll magazine," he says. "They were all monthly magazines and it was a fun ride. Last one I worked for was about beanie babies in the late nineties."

When that stint ended he went to work for Lowe's Home Improvement at their store on Broad Street in the Fan. "I was there the day they opened," says Zach. "I helped build the schools. It was three soul-sucking years."

And then he went to work for the Richmond Times Dispatch, working in their features section. "I ended up as a news



Top: Zachary Reid rings up a sale.



Above: The main showroom at Richmond Art Garage.

reporter," Zach says. "I covered education and I covered the arts. I was on the copy desk at one time. I kind of bounced around. I did that for eleven years."

It was during that period that Zach first held brush to canvas. "I started painting when I was working at the newspaper," he says. "I remember going around to the galleries, looking for a place to show my stuff. Richmond's got a gazillion galleries, and it's got some really good galleries. But there's not a professional gallery that wants to deal with people who don't have any experience. So that was the idea behind Art Garage."

The gallery formally opened this past October during the height of the pandemic. But despite the timing, the reception has been positive. "It's been a decent response," says Zach. "But it's definitely a destination thing. We've had music out here, and one of our

neighbors comes and sells drinks. We had Jonathan the Juggler one weekend. If there's stuff with an opening, people come out. We don't have a version of First Fridays with eight thousand people on the street."

That said, there are other art venues on Brookland Park Boulevard. "Just up the street there's ALMA's RVA, a gallery, and SCRAP RVA, which sells used art supplies," Zach says. "And then there's a pottery studio called Hand/Thrown."

Not to mention the vibe of the independently owned businesses, old and new, that grace this commercial corridor. Within a stone's throw of Art Garage are Ninja Kombucha, Fuzzy Cactus, Brookland Park Market, The Smokey Mug, Ms. B's Juice Bar, and Ruby Scoops Ice Cream & Sweets. "We have picnic tables outside, and on the weekend Ruby Scoops will send customers on down to us," says Zach.

"She doesn't have indoor seating, and she sometimes has people lined up all along the block for her ice cream."

He mentions his neighbor, Anthony Tucker, owner of Nomad Deli & Catering Company. "We own the parking lot and the garden on the other side," he says. "And Anthony uses it for seating."

We step outside and walk across the parking lot to a chain link fence that runs along the old bank building. "There's a neighborhood thing here," Zach says. "There's a neighborhood feel among the business owners. We all help one another."

This fall, once all the city permits are in place, Jennifer and Zach plan a substantial expansion of the gallery that will increase its size threefold. They plan to use a number of shipping containers, some of them stacked two-high, to construct an L-shape structure off the brick-and-mortar gallery. The expanded gallery will create a sort of protective horseshoe around the parking lot, forming a kind of courtyard that will be an ideal space for outdoor markets and live music events. "The enlarged gallery will allow us room for additional galleries, plus studio and workshop space," Zach says.

Richmond Art Garage is already gearing up for its fall season. In September, the gallery will host a show called Spirituality in Art. Curated by Jennifer Reid, the show will feature the work of more than a dozen artists, with special programs held every weekend that month.

The following month, Richmond Art Garage will showcase the works of Steven Walker in a special exhibition curated by Jennifer Glave. Steven will also help judge "Extraordin-Air," a plein air art competition co-sponsored by Richmond Art Garage and GlaveKocen.

As we move up to the sidewalk, just outside the chain link gate, Zach looks up the street to the west, and then to the east. "It's a good time to be on Brookland Park Boulevard," he says. "In a year or two it will even be better." **NR**

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# The Anti-Klan Act of 1871

by JACK R JOHNSON

**O**NE FRIDAY, less than 30 days before the 2020 Presidential election, a caravan of vehicles displaying Trump campaign flags and signs swarmed a Biden campaign bus in Texas, threatening them with semi-automatics and trying to drive them off the road. Individuals in the caravan screamed death threats and at least one Biden staff car was clipped. Biden staffers called 911 but the police refused to escort the bus and were slow to respond. Eventually, the bus reached its Austin destination, more or less intact.

No one was ever prosecuted for the incident, although the perpetrators were easily identified. One of the drivers in the caravan, Eliazar Cisneros, boasted on Facebook after the confrontation that he was responsible for bumping the campaign car out of the lane. “That was me slamming that f\*\*\*er ... hell yea,” he crowed in a since-deleted message.

Trump even tweeted an edited video of the drivers surrounding the bus with the caption “I LOVE TEXAS!” Later, Trump tweeted that the drivers were “patriots” who “did nothing wrong.”

That view is about to be challenged in court.

Recently, two lawsuits were filed in relation to the incident — one against the Trump supporting drivers, dubbed the ‘Trump Train’; and another against law enforcement who “turned a blind eye.” The plaintiffs are using a relatively old law, written nearly 150 years ago called the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, or the Third Enforcement Act of 1871.

As you might suspect from the title, the law was originally intended to protect against political violence and voter intimidation, particularly of formerly enslaved people. A series of these so called ‘enforcement’ laws gradually increased the power of the Federal government to prosecute efforts of voter suppression and intimidation at the special request of President Ulysses S. Grant.

The laws became necessary because local and state governments of the



ex-Confederacy refused to prosecute individuals who threatened or even killed Black voters. As a consequence, throughout the early years of Reconstruction, thousands of incidents of voter intimidation and violence were documented but never prosecuted. Most often Blacks were the direct recipients of these efforts, but many white Republicans who supported Black civil rights were also threatened and sometimes killed. Of particular concern to President Grant were the activities of specific white supremacist organizations like the White League or the recently formed Ku Klux Klan. The Klan, populated largely by ex-Confederate soldiers, actively worked to overthrow the newly elected Republican government.

At first, the Klan was relatively restrained in its actions. In the August

1867 state elections, they hoped to persuade Black voters that a return to their pre-war state of bondage was in their best interest. Nathan Forrest one of the original Klan members, and the first ‘grand wizard’ assisted in maintaining order. It was after these efforts failed that the Klan turned to violence.

By the 1868 presidential election, the gloves came off. In an 1868 interview by Cincinnati newspaper, Nathan Forrest claimed that the Klan had 40,000 members in Tennessee and 550,000 total members throughout the Southern states. Across the South, the Klan and other terrorist groups instituted a ‘reign of terror’ using brutal tactics to intimidate Republican voters. In Arkansas, over 2,000 murders were committed in connection with the election. In Georgia, the number of threats and

beatings was even higher. And in Louisiana, 1000 Blacks were killed as the election neared. In those three states, Democrats won decisive victories at the polls.

Ultimately, though, the Klan’s violence backfired. They proved to many Northerners that the South had not learned its lesson in the recent war; harsher laws would have to be passed in order to stop the violence and protect Southern Blacks. And those laws were soon in coming. Grant, whose slogan was “Let us have peace” won the election, and Republicans gained a majority in Congress.

Three successively stronger enforcement acts were passed to put an end to voter intimidation, culminating in the third act dubbed the Ku Klux Klan act which allowed Grant the power to use the military



to stop “insurrection, domestic violence, unlawful combinations, or conspiracies” against civil rights if a state’s government failed to act. For a year only, the law allowed Grant to suspend habeas corpus if anti-civil rights conspirators organized a rebellion.

As a response to the act, Klansmen in South Carolina were put on trial in front of juries made up of mainly Blacks. Grant declared martial law in nine South Carolina counties and suspended habeas corpus, prompting an estimated 2,000 Klansmen to flee the state. Prosecution efforts led to jail sentences of a few hundred Klan members. Many others were only given a warning, but by 1872, the ‘original’ Klan as an organization had been officially broken.

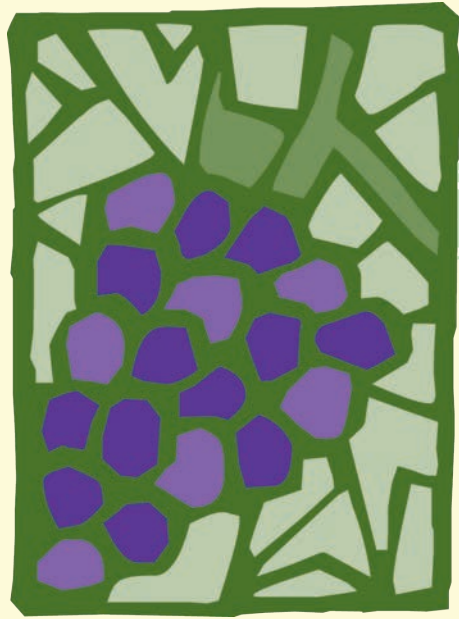
“By 1872, the federal government’s willingness to bring its legal and coercive authority to bear had broken the Klan’s back and produced a dramatic decline in violence throughout the South,” wrote historian Eric FONER. The Klan didn’t reemerge until two generations later, in 1915.

This same act (with some of its powers limited through subsequent court challenges), was used in 1964, when the United States Department of Justice charged eighteen individuals with conspiring to deprive Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman of their civil rights by murder because Mississippi officials refused to prosecute their killers for murder, a state crime.

This past December, the NAACP sued former president Donald Trump and the Republican Party under the Ku Klux Klan Act, alleging that they conspired to interfere with the civil rights of Black voters in Michigan. The case is pending in federal court.

And recently, the act was cited again in a federal lawsuit aimed at those involved in the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. According to The Washington Post, “the lawsuit accuses former president Donald Trump, his lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, and members of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers of conspiring in violation of the Klan Act to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden’s victory in the 2020 election.”

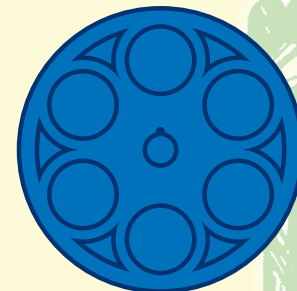
If he were alive, would Grant be proud that a law he pushed through has proven so useful over all these years; or dismayed that the law is still needed? **NJ**



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## CELEBRATION

# Juneteenth at Six Points Celebrating Youth and Freedom

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

**O**N JUNE-teenth at Six Points in Highland Park, the streets were closed off as hundreds gathered to celebrate what is often called Second Independence Day. Whether you call it Juneteenth or Freedom Day or Jubilee Day or Cel-Liberation Day or Emancipation Day, this day commemorates that singular event that occurred on Galveston Island, Texas more than a century and a half ago. With the reading of General Order No. 3, more than 250,000 men, women, and children were given the “unalienable rights” guaranteed in the Declaration of Independence, finally giving substance to the promises made on July 4 at Carpenters’ Hall in Philadelphia as a new nation was born.

“It’s finally a federal holiday, thanks to President Joe Biden,” says Valerie Slater, executive director of RISE For Youth. “It took two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed for federal troops to arrive in Texas to declare the slaves were free. It’s taken more than a hundred and fifty years for the government to finally acknowledge this significant holiday of independence.”

Valerie and Iyana Scroggins, who is a member of RISE For Youth, are standing near Fire House 15 where food and beverages are being served to a receptive crowd.

“This is our first annual Juneteenth Youth Talent Showcase and Block Party,” Valerie says. “We want this community to understand what youth can do when they are given the opportunity and the resources. We want the community to realize that our young people are so much more than their worst moment. And in their best moments we ought to be celebrating them and creating more opportunities for them.”

Iyana was one of many other members of RISE For Youth who made the Juneteenth Block Party a reality. “We try to give back to the community and get our message out there,” Iyana tells me. “For this event I helped out with



Top: Group of dancers at the Juneteenth Block Party put on by RISE For Youth.

Above: Left to right, Iyana Scroggins and Valerie Slater.

the planning. I did a little bit of everything just like everybody else from RISE For Youth. We all put in. We did all the recruiting. This whole thing was planned by the youth.”

Valerie, smiling as Iyana speaks, nods along with her words. “Our young people called everyone and invited them to participate,” Valerie says. “They followed up to make sure that our performers knew when their time slots would be. It started at noon and lasts till three. And as you

can see, it’s been a great success. All thanks to our youth.”

“RISE For Youth stands for reinvest in supportive environments for youth,” says Valerie. “Mission accomplished.”

Just then a group of young women, taking center stage, begin a spirited dance routine that has the crowd cheering and applauding. Then, Valerie Slater adds this: “So we had to come loud, come strong, declare youth are the future, and we are going to keep our kids free.” **NY**



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## DIVERSIONS

# The Dog Days in RVA How to Stay Cool

by FAYERUZ REGAN

**I**T'S THAT TIME OF YEAR when summer starts to hurt. We wonder whether we were only conditioned to love summer because of grade school anticipation.

Sometimes it's not the heat but the humidity. When I was younger, I had a neighbor who always sat on her front porch on summer nights. "Isn't it great?" she would ask. "It's so steamy and sensual." She embraced the sauna-like qualities. I decided to master humidity in my mind.

Two decades later and it still hasn't happened. But we should resist the idea of riding it out in air conditioned chambers. We relished the season throughout childhood, and come mid-winter, we'll question whether or not we made the most of summer. My own intolerance for scorching weather has bred a thorough knowledge of things you can do to keep cool throughout the dog days of summer, Richmond style.

## TEXAS BEACH

The water is crystal clear, shallow, and the smooth rocks beneath are a perfect place to sit and enjoy a cold drink. Let the cool water run over you as curious mosquito fish swim past. An added bonus is the brief but memorable walk along the trail that leads to the beach. It includes a foot bridge over railroad tracks and an outdoor stairwell, featuring murals from different Richmond artists on each level.

## SWEET 95

I've been to beaches around the world, and there's something distinctive about beach towns on the East Coast. They cannot be complete without a main strip lined with mini golf courses and old-fashioned ice cream stands. Sweet 95 on Arthur Ashe Boulevard makes you feel like you're on vacation. Like beach town ice cream stands, it's a wood structure painted in cheerful colors, independently-owned, and staffed by teenagers. To add authenticity, it's only open during the summer. The structure taunts us all year long, but when it's open, happy families tuck into banana splits on the outdoor patio, and it feels like you're on vacation.



Spending an afternoon on the James River at Osbourne Landing.

## PORCH LIFE

Ever notice that a cool breeze at night sweeps away that sticky feeling? Earth is trying to tell you something. You need to put a fan on your porch. If installing a ceiling fan isn't an option, plug in a portable fan and feel the transformation. The humidity spins out, and you and your friends can enjoy the fireflies and crickets in comfort. You might even need a sweater.

## AL FRESCO

If you're going to dine al fresco, look for patios that provide both shade and fans. The best spots add a little greenery, too. Dot's Back Inn in Bellevue has stretched its legs, and now features an expansive sidewalk patio. Adorned with strung lights and potted palm trees, you can enjoy a meal in a neighborhood so close-knit, that passersby on the sidewalk will often stop to chat with the diners. Blue Atlas in Fulton Hill has a porch that offers sweeping views of the city. Dinner is exciting, with small plate dishes from around the world. There's a curated market on-site as well. Brambly Park is a sprawling and much buzzed-about green space in industrial-style Scott's Addition. Their line of wines features an impressive list of chilled options to cool off with. Sit under the trees at a picnic table, and listen to local bands. That's right – live music is back.

## SPLASH PADS

If you're a parent, splash pads are a perfect place to cool off. Builders have been getting creative with the designs, delighting us with magic mushrooms and swinging buckets overhead. Twin Hickory, Stony Point Fashion Park and the Battery Park Pool have free splash pads that are open to the public. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden has an impressive set-up, and admission allows you to enjoy the rest of the garden.

## THE DOME

The Science Museum of Virginia isn't just for kids. Relieve your sunburned skin in the hurricane simulator; a glass box that blasts air onto you at varying hurricane speeds. On extra hot days, settle into a seat in The Dome. The air-conditioned theater envelops you as you enjoy breathtaking views of the galaxies, erupting volcanoes and more. Don't forget the popcorn!

## YOU TUBED

The James River is a mixed bag. There are rapids, waterfalls and some sections where the water is as still as glass. There's are great stretches of flatwater, and a number of businesses that are happy to guide you on a tubing adventure. Pack a cooler with drinks and sandwiches, and watch the world glide by.

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# Some Changes to the Practice and Procedure of Criminal Law

As many are aware, the Legislature has made sweeping changes to the practice and procedure of criminal law. Most of the changes take effect on July 1, 2021. In addition to the ones that have been in the headlines, there are several others of interest.

In determining BOND, there is now a presumption (though rebuttable) in favor of bond, whereas before, there was a large category of charges that put the burden on the defendant to overcome the presumption against bond.

When stopped for a TRAFFIC offense where a summons is otherwise prescribed, the police officer no longer has to arrest someone for refusing to sign a summons.

If someone is on PROBATION, and they are charged with violating the terms of their probation (where such violation is deemed “technical”) they will not be subject to jail on the first violation, and there will be a presumption against jail on a second violation. A third, or a violation for a new conviction obviates this, and the Judge may sentence the defendant to any sentence previously suspended (as has been the case before).

Finally, Virginia is no longer a death penalty state.



**Todd DuVal, Esq.**

McDonald, Sutton & Duval

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



# LOU KEETON

## HOW TO SLAY A BIG BAD WOLF, AND OTHER TALES

### SOME ARE BORN WITH THE LEAST COMMON OF ALL TALENTS—

a proclivity for compassion, a sort of evolutionary gene that moves us closer toward ideal humanity. Among them are a few rare ones who are endowed with something even less common—an uncanny ability to feel exactly what others feel as if they can slip into the skin of a fellow human being, do more than simply walk in their shoes, and in fact become them. There’s a sadness about this though. These empaths, because of the very quality that makes them so uncommon, can become easy prey for sinister parasites who feed in a narcissistic frenzy on these rare few. They attempt to devour them, swallowing them whole. Yet, these karma vampires don’t always succeed: Consider Lou Keeton.



**WE ARE SEATED AT A TABLE** in her living room, a sun-bright space in this 1926 Sears home she purchased this past winter. Since that time her family and friends have restored it to its former glory on this picturesque street in the heart of Northside.

From the time she was a little girl, each morning Lou would wake to, and at night go to sleep beside, a small framed picture of Cinderella and Prince Charming. And she knew them both very well, and loved them deeply. They were, after all, her mother and father, actors both. Shortly after her father, Craig, played Prince Charming to Cinderella, a young woman named Barbara, he got down on bended knee and proposed to her.

“So that’s how I grew up,” Lou tells me. “I saw them literally as fairy tale royalty. It was lovely, and it really connected me with storytelling because Cinderella is a tale that’s existed since the beginning of time in every single culture. So I did a lot of research from a very early age on that storytelling, and the cultural persistence throughout time and history. It’s a beautiful thing.”

Lou also recalls a photo album her parents keep. “It contains all their theatre productions, and it’s just beautiful to look through,” she says. “And I really wanted to be in that album as a child. So it would be my ultimate joy if my production photos made it into that album.”

As a child she was immersed in live theatre and film. One of her favorites was *Harvey*, starring Jimmy Stewart. “After watching the film, my mother took me to go see a high school production of *Harvey* to reinforce that learning,” Lou recalls. “I had all kinds of critiques of it even as a little girl.”

She was inspired, as a girl, by the actors who graced the silver screen during the Golden Age of Hollywood.

“Every Audrey Hepburn movie was a huge inspiration for me,” she says. “Katharine Hepburn was a huge inspiration for me. Spencer Tracey, he still my

by **CHARLES MCGUIGAN**





heart. Jimmy Stewart. All of these old Hollywood actors made me want to act and tell my own stories.”

These stars of old also influenced Lou on another level. “I really liked classical older films, and you can tell by my personal styling,” she says. “I’m into that kind of aesthetic.”

But it was the artistic quality of the films themselves, and a lot of theatre from that same period, that drew her in, and helped mold her as a theatrical artist. “The thing I love so much about that kind of storytelling is that it’s character driven,” says Lou. “Human stories are in everything that I do.”

When Lou attended high school in Ashland she discovered a talent she had, one that had been overlooked by our conventional schools. “This is when I think I really started getting the theatre bug,” she says. “I wrote little scenes for a show that we did every year called Madrigals. It was pure madrigals, and then a jester would come on and do something silly.”

She ended up playing the jester that one year. “I decided to write my own scenes,” Lou says.

The audience response blew her away.

“It was just wild to me when people actually laughed at my weird sense of humor and got what I was trying to do,” Lou remembers. “And I thought, well this is how I can share my voice, which was surprising to me.”

That’s because she had trouble reading, and was difficult to understand until she was in fourth grade. “I experienced a lot of language deprivation,” says Lou. “I have a processing disorder so it effects all of my senses. I do not hear or see or taste or touch the same way that anyone else does. It just processes differently in my brain. My perception is not conducive to the system we’ve created for our education. That’s something my mother reminded me of, that there was nothing wrong with me. There was something wrong with the system.”

Live theatre itself, in a very real sense, became her

teacher. “I didn’t think I could be a writer until I did the Madrigals,” Lou says. “Once I realized that I could bring characters to life with dialogue that changed everything.”

After high school, Lou attended the Conservatory at Shenandoah University up in Winchester. That’s where she would begin earning her theatrical chops, and working in professional theatre, where she would spread her wings for her first solo flight. It was also where she would be devalued and pigeonholed, and later raped.

Lou fell into a major that would help her in her professional career, and would lay the groundwork for what she ultimately wanted to do—the telling of stories that would empower the young.

“I was a theatre for youth major,” she says. “And it really reinforced for me that if I wanted to be sharing these messages of empowerment and starting these conversations and providing language to children, then I would have to start writing it myself.”

One of her professors, who would become her mentor, lamented the fact that there wasn’t any children’s theatre he liked that drew on the deep wellspring of American folklore.

So, Lou penned a production called *Cattywampus: Tall and True Tales of American Folklore*, which tells the stories of John Henry, Johnny Appleseed, and Annie Oakley. And that became the first show ever fully produced through the college’s touring children’s theatre.

At the same university, there were other professors who did their best to diminish Lou’s self-perception.

“When I was in college I was told that I would always be the ugly best friend, and they were training me to just own my ugliness,” she tells me.

I’m stunned by this, and tell her as much, for she is a lovely woman in every way.

Lou nods her head. “If there was a spectrum of beauty, I was on the lower end,” she says. “This was in college. The professors’ idea was that, we will take what we perceive to be your type and we will train you on how to make that your product, how to sell that image.”

It was during her college years, too, that Lou endured one of the most violent assaults imaginable. “I was raped on two occasions,” she says. “I don’t know a single woman in my entire life who has not been assaulted in some degree, if not raped. And I know many men who experienced assault from very early ages. I’ve survived at least nine near death experiences, so I’m a survivor in a lot of ways and every single time I’ve come out of these experiences I think, ‘It doesn’t have to be this way, how can I help foster another reality?’ And I think it’s so much in the stories that we tell our children.”

After college, Lou returned to Ashland and began touring nationally with Theatre IV, which she would do for the next three years. She did scores of plays, but one of her favorites was *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, in part, because of the role she won. “It blew my mind because remember when I was in college I was told that I would always be the ugly best friend,” Lou says. “So I got cast as Katrina Van Tassel in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and that was very exciting.”

But the most important play she did while touring with Theatre IV was *Hugs and Kisses*, which further cemented in Lou’s mind the need to reach children at a very early with important messages through the medium of theatre.



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"I did over three hundred shows," she recalls. "I played Emma also known as Judy, also known as Jemma; but at the time it was Emma."

*Hugs and Kisses*, a musical for children first produced in 1983, tells the story of a little girl who has been sexually abused.

Every time the play was performed, about five children would come forward with their own stories of abuse, according to Lou. "I spent three years with crying children in my lap," she says. "Children who were scared to leave me because I was the first adult that had ever heard them say this out loud. These are real children who will never be the same."

But the productions of this musical allowed, in certain instances, intervention.

"Sometimes I saw the children again," Lou says. "And I remember one little girl chased me down as I was breaking down the set and said, 'I talked to you last year and I'm safe now, and I wanted you to know that.' She was an elementary school child, maybe ten years old."

In one part of the show, Lou would dress as a large dog, and though she could see out of the eye holes, the audience could not see in. "I would use that time to scan the audience because after a certain amount of shows, and after a certain amount of training, you kind of get a sixth sense," says Lou. "I also see auras. It was almost like these children who had been assaulted were glowing an entirely different color than anyone else."

During one performance, Lou spotted a girl in the audience who was bundled up and was actually shaking in her seat as she watched the production. After the show, Lou approached a social worker and mentioned the little girl she had seen.

The social worker nodded. "That little girl's over there speaking to somebody right now," she told Lou.

Later, as the crew began breaking down the set, the social worker came up to Lou and said, "We've got that little girl's story now and we already have a plan, but she wants to speak to you."

Lou folds her arms and her eyes moisten. "So we found a little private corner and for the first time I heard the whole story and in painful detail," she tells me. "And by the end of it she had crawled into my lap and she was clinging to me and crying and saying, 'You can't leave me, you're the only person who loves me and believes me.'" But Lou had to leave; the company was heading out for another gig.

Just three months later, something out of a fairy tale occurred. Lou was dressed up as Snow White at the Fairy Tale Ball, a party sponsored by the the-



Keeton playing Aunt Sheila in Richmond Triangle Players' *It Shoulda Been You*.

atre company. There was no way anyone could have possibly recognized her in wig, makeup, and costume.

"And this little voice calls out my name," Lou says. "And it was the same little girl, but she was taller, her hair was braided, she had glasses on, and she was wearing this beautiful pink dress. When I first met her I thought she was six or seven but three months later I thought she could be ten or twelve. I said, 'How are you here?' And she said, 'I'm here with my foster parents.'"

In a scant three months social services had removed the girl from a horrifically abusive household and placed her in a loving home.

The girl's foster mom introduced herself to Lou.

"Why don't you two spend the evening together?" she said, and the girl beamed. Though Lou had work, she simply canned it.

"This little girl and I danced all night; we ate cupcakes, we cried together," Lou says. "I have a picture of her on my phone—something I can't show anyone. It's my reminder of the power of theatre, the power of storytelling, the power of supporting people."

Lou pauses and then says, "Every day I told those children, 'You are so brave,' and it's something I tell myself when I'm viewing myself as a best friend. I like to think if I ever saw that little girl

again, that I could say, 'I've been there, you're an inspiration, and I love you.'"

While she was still touring with Theatre IV, Lou went to work as a writing apprentice with Theatre Lab. That's when she and Dax Dupuy first teamed up. "Dax had a lot of songs she had written about food and as we were talking about how food was a major element in all the important milestones in our lives," Lou remembers. "You have food when a baby is born, you have food at weddings, you have food at funerals. So we wanted to depict these two friends through the course of their friendship."

Out of that collaboration was born *Food Baby*. "I wrote the book, and Dax Dupuy wrote the score and we performed in it and starred in it as well," says Lou. "That was the first production for Theatre Lab."

It was also the very first production of The Whistle Stop Theatre Company. It was Dax and Lou, her parents, and Lorie Foly, who launched the company. "And on opening night the entire town of Ashland came to see the show," Lou says. "All of Ashland was crammed into this tiny little space that was a converted firehouse garage. We realized that Ashland was crying out for its own theatre company."

The first children's theatre The Whistle Stop Theatre Company produced was Lou's own version of *Cinderella*. And over the years Lou has rewritten clas-



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sic children's stories that contain more contemporary and poignant messages.

"Adding a modern relevance is a huge goal of *The Whistle Stop*," says Lou. "Finding these stories that have informed our culture and updating them so that they can really speak to our present day conversations is important to us. And that doesn't necessarily mean that I'll take a show from the 1800s and make it modern day. It's more about concepts. For instance, in *The Little Mermaid*, her whole motivation was to marry the prince. In my version her whole motivation is to gain a soul—so what does that mean, and how does that inform my empathy for my audience? As a person who has the opportunity to create new media I want to make sure the messages that I'm sharing make a difference."

We talk about other fables and fairy tales that have worked their way into our universal psyche. "Many of them were rooted as cautionary tales," Lou says.

When I mention one of the eeriest and the most enduring of all fairy tales, Lou's eyes fairly widen.

"I keep coming back to *Little Red Riding Hood*," she says. "It is a story which I've never attempted to adapt because I feel so intensely about it. There's a theory

that *Little Red Riding Hood* was written as a cautionary tale for rape. It seems really obvious, right, but then they're banning Trina Schart Hyman book because she depicts grandma drinking wine. This is how we keep informative storytelling from our children."

There's something about this girl and this wolf that strikes a particularly strident chord with Lou, who, for several years, was in throes of a dangerous relationship that nearly pulverized her.

"While I was in an abusive relationship, I experienced abuse from the very beginning, but I didn't identify it that way because I was always surrounded by love and support," says Lou. "In Trina Hyman's edition of *Little Red Riding Hood* there's one part that says *Little Red Riding Hood* didn't know that the wolf was dangerous so she was polite to him just as she was to everyone else. And I think that was ultimately my downfall, and why I've experienced so much mistreatment in my life. I just don't see people as dangers."

"My abuser was very manipulative and they used a lot of gas lighting," Lou says. "I would see what was happening and try to articulate it with the limited experience and knowledge that I had, and they would say, 'You're wrong.



Playwright Keeton at the production of one of her many shows.

This is love.' And I would believe them. And I would treat them with the same kind of kindness that I hoped would be given back to me. It was never enough." She remembered a song from the musical *Six*. "Jane Seymour's song, where she

sings about having a heart of stone, is so parallel to my experience in an abusive relationship," says Lou. "It really hit home to me because the whole time I was experiencing this abuse and being told that it was love, I felt so strong for enduring

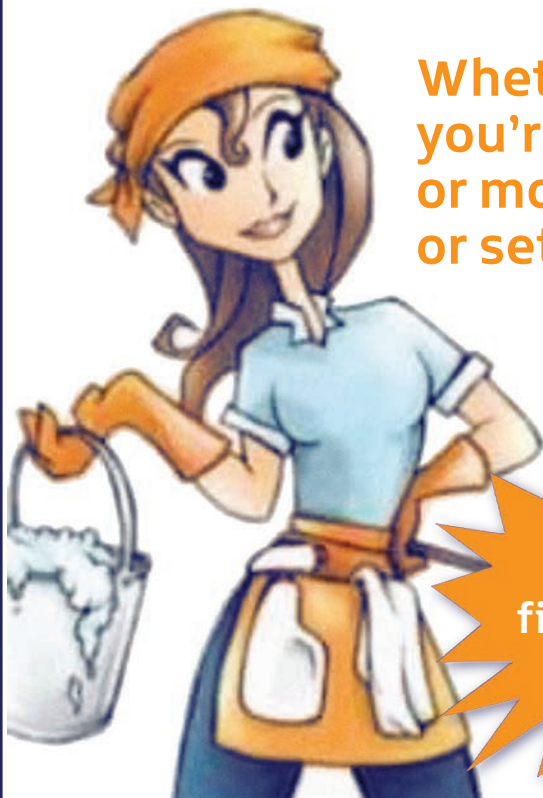
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it. It didn't matter that they were yelling at me, or diminishing me, or objectifying me or putting me in dangerous situations because I was strong enough to endure it. That's what love is, right; love is endurance. That's what I had in my mind. It wasn't until I realized that I was not strong enough and that I was literally dying, that I had to make a choice for me for the first time in my life."

And then Lou Keeton mentions the song *I Know Things Now* from the Sondheim musical *Into the Woods*. It's about Little Red Riding Hood, and

Lou sings it through in gut-wrenching a capella that brings me to tears.

*"Mother said,  
'Straight ahead,'  
Not to delay  
or be misled.  
I should have heeded  
Her advice . . .  
But he seemed so nice . . ."*

Lou remembers that when she first learned the song, her mother would frequently point out to her that nice is different than good.

"That was a very important line because I was nice to everybody and if they showed me any shred of kindness I was like, 'We're best friends forever,'" she says. "And I put all of my energy into them, so of course it made me a prime candidate for abuse. But it's also one of my favorite things about myself that I have so much energy and empathy to give other people."

During her last meeting with her abuser, Lou said, "I know you do not believe in therapy, but it would be beneficial to you."

"I just left and I haven't seen them since,"

says Lou. "I think of my abuser sometimes and I see the way they looked at me. I thought that that was love, but now I realize that it was ownership, it was control. It was fear. I learned a lot from this, and I hope to pass on those lessons so that nobody else has to experience it again. I know that that's impossible, but I'll touch whatever tiny part of the world that I have access to."

And as playwright, actor, photographer and director, Lou Keeton has all the tools in her belt necessary to touch more than a tiny part of the world. **N3**



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## PUBLIC ART

# New Northside Mural: What's Love Got to Do with It?

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

**W**HAT'S NOT TO love about Northside? Absolutely nothing. But there's a lot to love about it.

So much in fact that it's going to be hard to decide exactly what will make up the Northside Love Mural to be painted on the side of the old dry cleaners building at the southwest corner of Brook Road and Bellevue Avenue.

It probably all started on Next Door when someone mentioned how the façade of that building had been tagged, yet again. Someone suggested painting a mural there that would do everyone proud.

"It was one of those organic things," says Bellevue resident Elaine Summerfield. "There are so many people involved in this project. We have a great team of neighbors working to get it done."

Even though the mural will be in Bellevue, the objective is for the artwork to reflect what people throughout Northside love about their neighborhood. "We'd really love to have representation from other Northside neighborhoods as well because we see this as an opportunity for doing something positive that we can all be proud of, and doing it together as a Northside community," says Elaine. "So we've done some outreach to other neighborhoods, and right now we're trying to get interest and build momentum."

From Barton Heights to Washington Park, from Rosedale to Sherwood Park, all of these neighborhoods are part of the fabric that makes Northside what it is. And each neighborhood possesses its own unique qualities that are lovable.

"We're generating ideas, right now," Elaine says. "We have a survey online ([bit.ly/BrookRdMural](https://bit.ly/BrookRdMural)) where we're asking our Northside neighbors to share what they love about Northside. If there are words that represent what you love about Northside, or if there are images that you think represent what you love about Northside, let us know."

If you're a Northsider, you can imagine just how many suggestions there have



Site of the proposed Northside Love Mural

already been. "People are expressing that the diversity of their neighborhood is something they love," says Elaine. "There was one person who mentioned we need to include a reference to the Powhatan tribe in respect to the native lands the city stands on. We have a lot of representations of people waving at neighbors, and the connections people have in Northside. We have dog walking and baby strollers and kids and bicycles. And the diverse architecture of every Northside neighborhood."

Those suggestions will ultimately be passed on to the artist who will paint the mural (an artist has not yet been chosen). "There's a lot to represent, and that will be part of the artist's creativity and vision to conceptualize how that will come together in one mural," Elaine tells me. "From the get-go we wanted this to be a collaborative effort where people can participate at different levels."

Recently, Joyce Foster, another Bellevue resident involved with the Northside Love Mural, drafted an RFP (request for proposal), which is a kind business document that describes a project and solicits bids.

"The request for proposal describes the process that this is a collaborative mural project and that we hope to include volunteers," according to Elaine. "And that the artist will be working with the team, presenting a few different concepts for the team to consider."

Early on, the Bellevue Civic Associa-

tion, which has agreed to serve as fiscal sponsor for this project, donated \$1500 for the Northside Love Mural. Third District Councilor Mary-Frances Lambert has also committed to a \$500 donation for the project.

In typical Northside fashion, the team behind the Northside Love Mural wants to help another mural project in the area, one that is planned for the north wall of True North Yoga & Wellness on MacArthur Avenue. Called the Unity Mural, that project was spearheaded by Aliza Sterling, owner of the yoga studio. The mural will reflect the diversity and inclusivity that define neighborhood of Bellevue.

"We are also wanting to see the vision on MacArthur come around," says Elaine. "On our GoFundMe we mention the one for the Unity Mural because we'd really love for her to be able to get that done in September, and then we can do ours after that. I'd love for hers to go in first."

Of the Northside Love Mural and the team that's putting it together, Elaine Summerfield says this: "It doesn't belong to any one person, it's everybody's. It's not about any one person at all; it's the total opposite of that."

And that's what we all truly love about Northside. **NJ**

To donate to the Northside Love Mural go to: [gofundme.com/f/Brook-Rd-Mural](https://gofundme.com/f/Brook-Rd-Mural)

To donate to the Unity Mural go to: [gofundme.com/f/mural-for-unity](https://gofundme.com/f/mural-for-unity)



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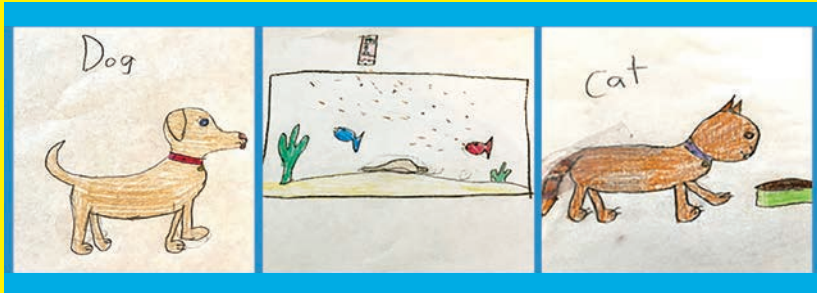
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## BOOK REVIEW

# On the Nature Of Oak Trees

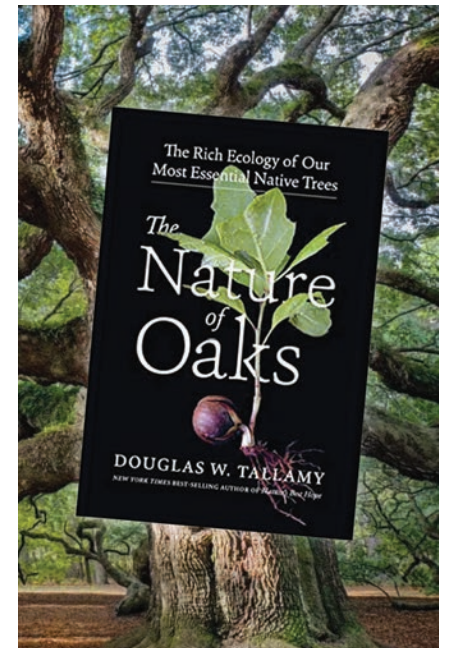
by FRAN WITHROW

I'M A BIG FAN OF DOUG Tallamy, a University of Delaware professor who advocates for native plants and protection for local wildlife like nobody else. I previously reviewed his book, "Nature's Best Hope," in which he explains how we can support biodiversity by what we plant right in our own back yards. I appreciate his congenial, positive approach to promoting environmental causes and his commitment to conservation.

In his newest release, "The Nature of Oaks," Tallamy hits the ball out of the park once again. This lovely book reveals everything you might want to know about these "keystone" trees that are critical for a healthy ecosystem. Oak trees provide sustenance and shelter for a dizzying array of insects—511 species in Pennsylvania where Tallamy lives—which in turn feed our birds. Other trees don't even come close: maples host 295, but red-buds provide for a mere 24 species of insects, and sweetgums only 35.

Tallamy's book is sectioned by month, and in each one the reader learns more about how incredible oaks are. In January, for instance, many birds survive the bitter weather by feasting on caterpillars hidden in oak bark and crevices. It is a misconception that birds need our feeders to survive: caterpillars are a more nutritious, fat-filled and protein-rich source of food for them. (Not only that, but baby birds cannot digest seeds or insects: therefore caterpillars are the perfect first food for these new hatchlings.) Migratory birds also depend on these yummy morsels of natural goodness.

A good chunk of the book looks at the various insects that thrive on oaks and how important they are to the ongoing life cycle of our ecosystem. Insects hide not only on trees themselves, but also in the leaf litter on the ground. Tallamy says this is a good reason not to rake every last leaf away in the fall. Don't rake your leaves at all, or at least leave some in designated areas for the insects hidden in, under, and between them.



Tallamy even addresses the myths people have surrounding oaks: they are too large, they fall on houses, they drop massive amounts of leaves, their roots break up sidewalks. You will be pleased to learn that there are ways to avoid these issues and still have oaks in your yard.

There are plenty of color pictures of various oaks as well as the insects and birds who depend on them in this intriguing and informative read. As a bonus, Tallamy also lists good oak choices for the interested homeowner, divided by region as well as by size. So if your yard is small, you can still plant one of these spectacular trees. He even includes a chapter on how to plant an oak. (Hint: it might not be in the best interest of an oak—or your pocketbook—to buy an expensive sapling.)

Have you been outside recently to look at an oak? Go ahead, find one to admire.

I'll be doing the same. 

**The Nature of Oaks**  
By Douglas W. Tallamy  
\$27.95  
Timber Press  
197 pages



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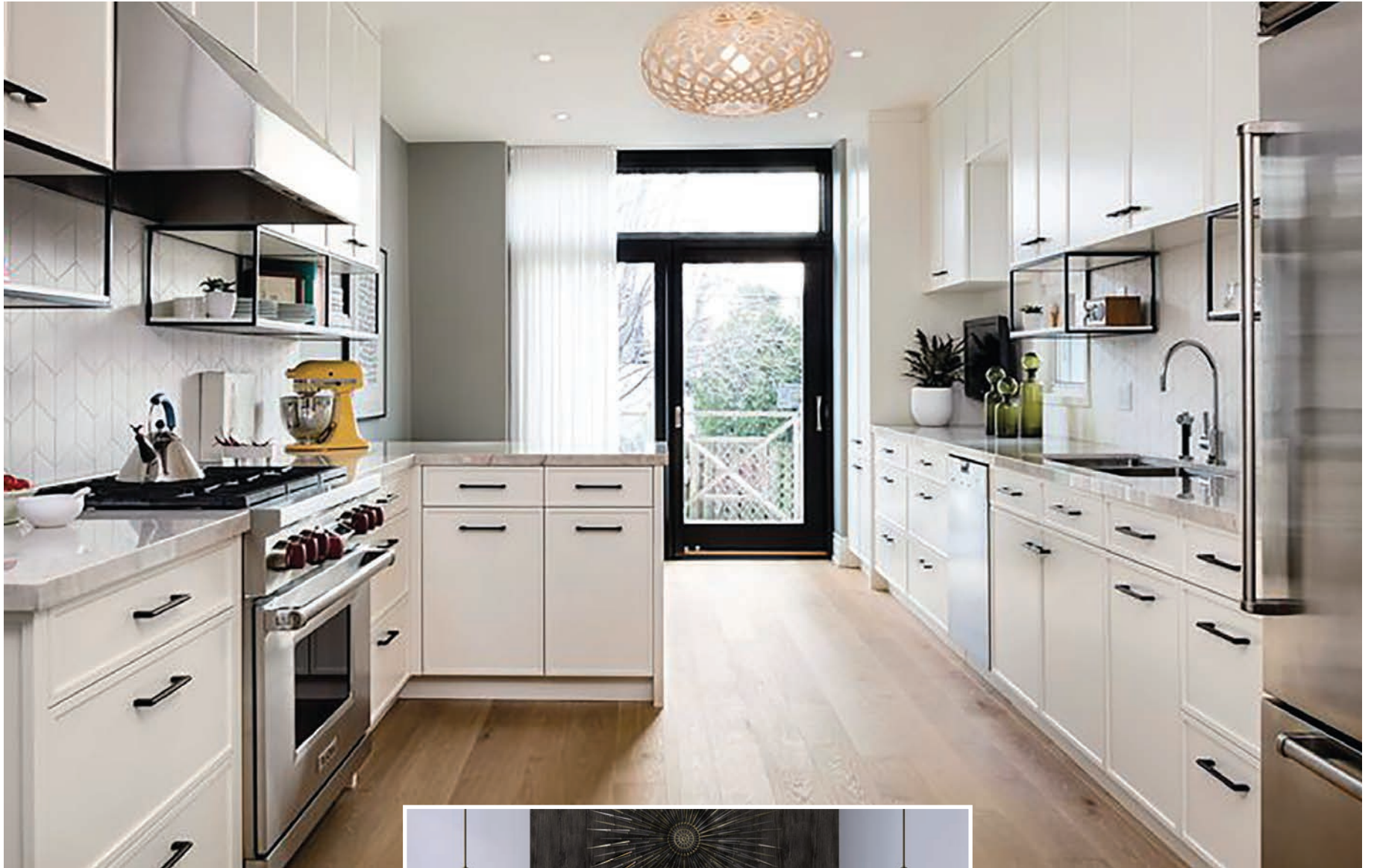


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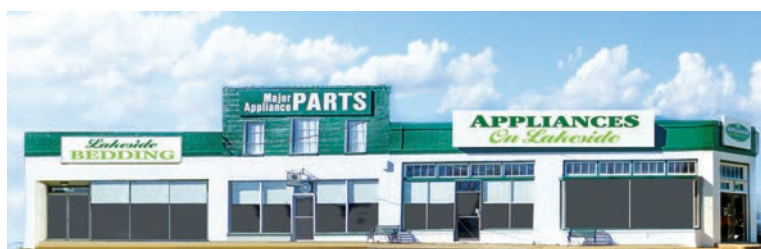


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