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KENYA

Gibson

the Third District's representative on the Richmond School Board, won a fairly contentious race for the seat after it was vacated by Jeff Bourne, who went on to serve in the House of Delegates. Kenya has two children, a boy and a girl, both of whom attend Richmond public schools. In her first year in office, Kenya has been a staunch supporter of government transparency, and is working hard to ensure that the city provide every student with a safe and effective public education. She does not support the current mayor's \$1.4 billion Coliseum project. "That should be for somebody else to do, not the city," she says. Above everything else, Kenya is an ardent activist, what truly committed representatives of the people have always been. *continued on page 10*

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RESTAURANT REVIEW

Proper Pie Company Kiwi-Inspired, American as Apple Pie

by ANNE JONES

CLAIRE DANES KNOWS pie. She knows it so well that in her promo video for Virginia she recognized that Proper Pie Company is one of Richmond's greatest assets.

"Out of this world" she called it; she also ordered bunches of pies for her Homeland crew to say thank you, with the note, "An ENTIRELY selfless offering to our crazy bananas amazing crew...And no, of COURSE, I didn't stick my fat face in every single one of these works of art."

I know my pie too, and I agree with Claire. Proper Pie pies are works of art, the stuff of legends. These aren't just your typically delicious standard bakery pies like apple or chocolate or lemon chess. These are New Zealand-style meat pies, a concept I was totally unaware of until my proper pie education. New Zealand-style means a "hand-sized meat pie containing diced or minced meat and gravy, sometimes with onion, mushrooms, or cheese and often consumed as a takeaway food snack." Proper Pie pies are more meal than snack, but they look downright cute. Just small enough to hold in your hand, they are pleasingly browned, with curvy, serrated edges and flaky crust covering the top. In fact, the directions on their blackboard advise you to "eat your savory pies with your hands, straight outta the bag - it's fun and the Kiwis do it."

Despite the meaty origin of these delicacies, Proper Pie doesn't ignore their vegan and vegetarian patrons. Being a semi-vegetarian myself, I chose a broccoli and smoked gouda pie on my first visit. The filling was full of chopped broccoli and savory cheese, and the consistency was perfect - not quiche-like as I had expected, but more like a casserole. I had feared the filling would be an over-salted mush, but it was just the opposite. Somehow, despite the cheese and the crust, it was light and fresh-tasting, with delicate flavors. The chili bean and cheese choice on my second visit was equally remarkable, mainly because each of the ingredients was discernible - chunky tomatoes and whole beans, with the slightest of kicks. These pies are just delicious little meals surrounded by flaky, scrumptious crusts.



There's no standard menu at Proper Pie; they post the fare on Facebook every day, and the variety is impressive: mince and cheese, pork and sausage gumbo, smoked salmon, leek and potato, chicken and kumara, spinach and feta roll are just a few choices from last week.

And though Proper Pie is defined by the unique savory pies, they also excel at "Sweet by the slice" pies. These may be more what I think of as pie, but there is nothing standard about them, with flavors like Buttermilk and raspberry, peach and blackberry, pear almond, and of course, apple. I'm not sure why I wasn't more adventurous but I panicked when it came time to order and blurted out "apple!" (Though the staff is as nice and helpful as can be, efficiency is the name of the game, and you better have your act together when you get to the counter). But one can hardly go wrong with apple pie, and this was some of the very best I have ever eaten: big slices of tart apple with a subtle brush of sweet cinnamon, in the buttery flaky crust. There are also sweet Anzac biscuits, mock turtle bars, mellow puffs, lamington (Australian cake delicacy), hot chocolate, coffee drinks and more. Maybe it's a dessert place after all.

Snack, meal, or dessert, and borrowed from Down Under, it's all as American as Proper Pie. **NJ**

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ART

Darryl Starr's Czech Hedgehog Through February at Black Iris Gallery

IT'S AN IMPOSING sculpture, battleship grey—something that could have stopped a German Panther tank dead in its tracks. In the peacetime artistic interpretation of Richmond sculptor Darryl Starr, this unique three-dimensional object is tasked with preventing everything from anti-Semitism to white supremacy, and so many of the other odious affronts to freedom unleashed by a sitting president who equivocated about Nazis and neo-Confederates when in August of 2017 they descended on Charlottesville, killing one woman and injuring many other people. The night before, they paraded through the streets with torches, as they yelled bigoted epithets reminiscent of Kristallnacht.

This installation is part of an exhibition at Black Iris Gallery called “Under My Skin”. Curated by artist Diane Clement, the exhibit explores how the exterior world inspires artists to create. Along with the works of Diane and Darryl there are also pieces by Wolfgang Jasper, William Parrish and Helene Roberts.

“The title is no words,” Darryl Starr told me earlier this month at the art opening. He pointed to a sheet of white paper taped to the wall behind his sculpture. Next to the word “TITLE”, there is a blank, but beneath it is a photo of the mayhem in Charlottesville taken shortly after Heather Heyer was killed by a Nazi, and more than 19 others were seriously wounded by other fascists.

“A picture says a thousand words,” Darryl said. “That’s what motivated me to make this. It’s a response to that white, right-wing craziness, and it’s based on a historic defensive obstacle created by the Czechoslovakians to stop tanks.” He lowered his palm to one of the sides of the metal sculpture, and patted it.

“It’s called a Czech Hedgehog,” he said. “It’s ominous, it’s the most aggressive thing I’ve ever made.”

Czech hedgehogs were invented by Czechoslovakians to repulse invading Nazis. They’re remarkable defenses, both for their simplicity of design and their indomitable nature.



Czech Hedgehog installation at Black Iris Gallery

Regardless how they are upset, they always return to their strong defensive position.

Darryl invited me to consider the game of ball and jacks, which was originally known as knucklebones, and was played with knucklebones extracted from sheep. A jack, generally made of metal, consists of six knobs radiating off a common base.

“They were kind of like those jacks, they would always land in the same position,” Darryl explained. “When this hedgehog is displaced, or blown up, or moved in any way, it always lands in a perfect defensive position. Always ready to go. I view this as a first line of resistance.”

There is a harsh elegance in the angular design of the piece. “Human eyes are automatically drawn to geometric forms,” said Darryl. “And people love the triangles.” He slowly moved around the sculpture. “As you can see, it’s made up of triangles,” he said.

Darryl considered another symbol that is weak by comparison. “In my crazy world, I’d like to replace the Nazi symbol of the swastika with this, which is the swastika’s antithesis,” he said. “The swastika was two-dimensional and square, this is three-dimensional and triangular.”

Darryl hopes to take his sculpture to a number of locations to emphasize the need for resistance against Nazis and other American bigots. “This is just a symbol for all those conflicts and all that resistance,” he said. “I’m applying for a special events permit to shoot in Hollywood Cemetery near the Confederate pyramid. I’ve contacted the Jewish Community Center. All these things that need to be addressed, these things we must resist.”

On display through February at:
Black Iris Gallery,
321 West Broad Street,
804-620-7321


**NORTHSIDER
JENNA MORRISEY'S
ART AT STIR CRAZY**



Nicole Plummer poses next to a portrait of herself at Stir Crazy Café. In the photo she wears a costume and headdress designed by Jenna Morrisey, who is also the photographer whose work is featured through February at Stir Crazy. Both Jenna and Nicole are in the department of photography at VCUarts.

Northside artist Jenna Morrisey merges her artistic talents in photography and fashion design in an exhibit that runs through February at Stir Crazy Café. Her sumptuous photographs of Richmond women dressed in glamorous outfits and exotic headdresses that she created were shot in various locations throughout Richmond. Her interests include architecture photography, abstract figurative images, and fiber crafts.

“My work falls between portrait, theatre, and fashion photography,” Jenna says. “Exploring glamour through photography is one of my interests. In this series I created the costumes—some of which are entirely hand-sewn, and others that I embellished—and then chose a setting that fits the theme. One of my strongest interests in portrait photography is transformation. From the use of subtle makeup to enhance someone’s natural beauty to an elaborate look and dramatic makeup that transforms the person. I use different fabrics with a variety of textures . . . to create an elegant feel.”

A reception for Jenna will be held the last week in January—date to be announced. You may contact the artist at jennmorrisey@gmail.com. 

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BOOK REVIEW

Mystery of the Purloined Feathers

by FRAN WITHROW

MY HUSBAND loves fly fishing, and occasionally I have watched as he sits at his desk, painstakingly tying flies using ordinary feathers from Cabela's or Orvis. Then I read "The Feather Thief" and learned not everyone is satisfied with dyed turkey feathers. There are fanatical fly tiers out there who yearn for rare feathers to make specific flies.

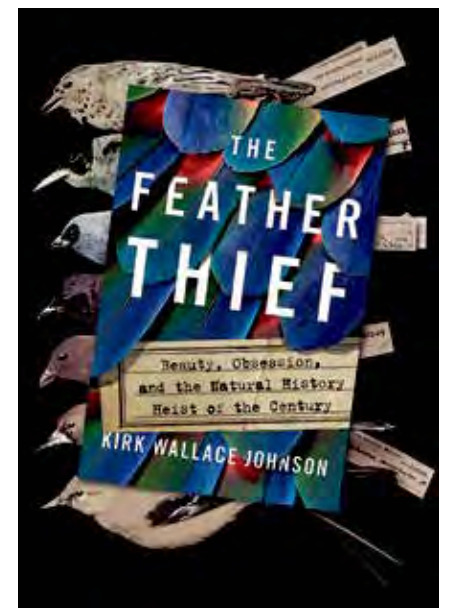
Unlike my husband, the most ardent fly tying hobbyists do not actually fish. The satisfaction for them comes from tying intricate flies, and high on the list is a recipe for "salmon flies," which calls for extremely rare feathers. Uh oh.

And how's this for irony: salmon don't care if the fly is a feather or a tuft of fur, yet hobbyists spend incredible amounts of money trying to obtain and create these rare, highly desired flies.

One such obsessed fly tier is Edwin Rist, an American student who was studying flute at London's Royal Academy of Music in 2009. Edwin Rist wanted some of these rare feathers so desperately he broke into the British Museum of Natural History and stole an appalling 299 rare bird specimens, some dating back 150 years. He began selling bird skins and packets of feathers online. Though he was caught, many of the birds remained missing. Where did they go?

Author Kirk Wallace Johnson was fly fishing himself when he heard about this crime and the ensuing mystery. Struggling with burnout from his job helping Iraqi refugees, Johnson decided to take a break and do some digging himself. Tenaciously, over a period of five years, he investigated, learning about rare birds like the Spangled Cotinga, a gorgeous bright blue bird with a red chin and throat, and the breathtaking, four foot long Resplendent Quetzal. It is illegal to buy or sell packets of Quetzal feathers but, sadly, they can easily be found online.

Johnson begins his story by describ-



ing the dedicated work of early naturalists like Alfred Russel Wallace, who spent many years gathering thousands of bird specimens and was a contemporary of Charles Darwin. Johnson explains how the British Museum got the bird skins and the importance of the accompanying tags, stating the date and location where each bird was found. This is critical data for scientists who continue to learn about how birds migrate, how their DNA changes over time, and other useful information.

Johnson writes with disarming honesty about his quest to find the missing bird skins and their tags. This is a guy who knows he is no Sherlock Holmes, yet he is dedicated and tireless at his task. What he finds is surprising and even has a little twist at the end. Just like a real detective story!

Since this is non-fiction, the ending isn't all tied up in a neat package. Justice is not served. But the truth is revealed, and, thanks to Kirk Wallace Johnson, the Feather Thief will not slip away without a trace. Perhaps this book will raise awareness about protecting rare birds, those left alive as well as ones captured long ago. **NJ**

The Feather Thief
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MUSIC




Sounds of China AT U OF R

LED BY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR and composer Ma Jiuyue, Sounds of China features an outstanding ensemble of contemporary Chinese folk musicians blending the ancient and modern by combining traditional Chinese music with modern arrangements. The group incorporates traditional Chinese instruments such as erhu (a two-stringed spike fiddle), liuqin (a four-stringed Chinese mandolin), xun (a globular, vessel flute), pipa (a plucked four-string lute), and guzheng (a Chinese zither) with Western orchestral instruments. With critically-acclaimed performances throughout the United States, Sounds of China has been recognized for increasing and cultivating the appreciation and understanding of traditional Chinese music and culture.

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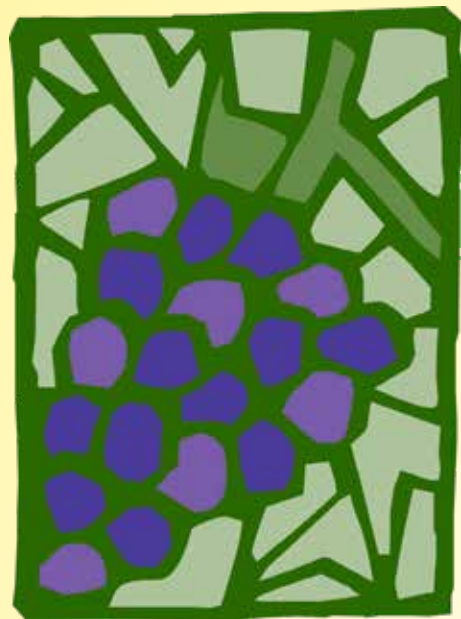


Sonni G & THE BASEMENT BOYS

Sonni G and The Basement Boys, a five-piece band, will be playing at Ellwood Thompson's on February 9 from 5 to 7pm, and at CrossRoads Coffee and Ice Cream on March 9 from 7:30 till 10:30 pm. This cover band plays everything from The Beatles and Stevie Wonder, to Bonnie Raitt, Aretha Franklin, James Taylor and Billie Holiday. 


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Kenya Gibson

ACTIVIST AND ADVOCATE

KENYA GIBSON CAME BY IT ALL HONESTLY ENOUGH

She was raised a New England Yankee by a white mother, who was a visual artist, and a black father, who was a television producer. She was born in Boston but lived in New Haven and Stamford, Connecticut, and then in Attleboro and Newton, Massachusetts. In her own words, Kenya's parents, Nancy and Albert, were "hippies". They were committed to justice. Her father had been in the Peace Corps, and, with a former colleague, would later found a non-profit that advocated for the education of girls in Nigeria. "In terms of the advocacy piece, there's family history there," Kenya tells me at the outset of the interview. "And my being a biracial person gave me, as I was growing up, a unique lens."

FROM THE TIME SHE

was a child, Kenya sensed she wasn't quite like everyone else, which was fine with her. "I've always seen that there are things that have made me different," she says. "Whether it was because I lived in an apartment, or whether it was because my mother drew children's books. I've been used to being different. When I was in school in Stamford, having a white parent, I recognized that that made me different than my peers. And when we moved to Newton, Massachusetts, I was also different. It was a predominantly Jewish community and I was raised Catholic. I appreciated that there were a lot of things that set me apart from my peers, and I think for the most part I liked that. I think I thought those things were what made me special."

Kenya excelled academically, and after high school attended William and Mary where she double-majored in economics and fine arts. It was a way to feed both sides of her brain; the one hemisphere gorging itself on the analytical, while the other half devoured the creative. "That's the way my brain's always worked," she says.

After completing her undergraduate work, Kenya moved to Richmond with her college roommate, who is still one of her closest friends. The pair lived in the Museum District, and Kenya was drawn to interior design. Ultimately, she would attend Yale University and receive a master's degree in architecture.

After her first year at Yale, she won an internship with a large architectural firm and went to work in their retail studios out in Seattle. "I was drawn to that," she says. "It was compelling that there's a relationship between something that you're designing, and that you're going to see a financial result from.



The space you were creating, and the business were intimately tied together."

While at Yale, she met Michael, the man she would eventually marry. When he ended up going to Columbia University in New York, Kenya landed a job with Saks Fifth Avenue, managing their shop-in-shop installations. The couple later moved to the Los Angeles area. While her husband worked for an architectural firm, Kenya went to work for Disney Stores, where she worked on designing a new prototype for their stores. It was while living in California that the Gibsons had their first child.

The three of them lived in a house in Altadena, just a few blocks away from a public elementary school. But Kenya soon discovered something about her neighbors. "The couple across the street from us weren't sending their kids to that sweet little school just down the street," she says. "Where we lived in California, it was very common for people to send their kids to private schools. And I think that impacts the community."

Kenya was getting a little homesick for the East Coast, so she and her family moved to Richmond, where she

went to work with Circuit City. After Circuit City folded, Kenya began working for ad agencies, and is now a partner in a small agency called Epiphany, which sells architectural and building products to architects.

When the Gibsons returned to Richmond, real estate agents showed Kenya and Michael homes in Midlothian and Hanover County. "But none of those places felt like home," she remembers. And then they found a house in Bellevue. "We bought our home on Princeton and fell in love with North Side," Kenya tells me. And then she pauses. "My dear friend from William and Mary, the one I moved to Richmond with, lives on Brook Road, and my friend I lived with in Seattle lives on Laburnum. So this is where I was supposed to be."

Not long after arriving in Richmond, the Gibson's daughter, their oldest child, was nearing school age. Kenya began following the news of what was happening to Richmond Public Schools. This was during the recession of 2008, and the state was planning to cut education funding to the city. "I remember reading those articles and how that was going to impact our school system that was already struggling to meet the

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO

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Kenya advocating for public education at City Hall.

basic, essential needs,” she says.

That’s when Kenya’s activism kicked in. “I just started showing up at School Board and City Council meetings,” she remembers. “I went to rallies. I connected with the other organizers.”

And then she did something she never imagined she would do. “I was asked to join the PTA, and I did,” she says. She would later serve as vice president of Holton Elementary School’s PTA. And then one summer she attended a PTA conference. “I was wondering what I was doing there,” says Kenya. “I never really saw myself as a PTA mom.”

By the end of that session, Kenya’s knew exactly why she was there. “In addition to the really helpful sessions on how to manage and structure PTA events,” she says. “I went to a couple of sessions that were very focused on advocacy. I was so inspired by the work that the PTA in the state has done to advocate for students with dyslexia, and to fight for funding. And so I really felt like I was where I was supposed to be.”

As vice president of Holton’s PTA, Kenya continued her advocacy work. She was able to get Third District Councilman Chris Hilbert to attend a PTA function. “We got him on the record saying he would advocate and push for more funding,” she says. “I organized a forum for the Third District race in 2016, and had the candidates for both City Council and the School Board there.”

She also created a database of PTA members throughout the Richmond School District. “We needed it to keep members aware of things that were happening, whether it was a big budget meetings a City Council, or a rally at the Capitol,” says Kenya.

And she also did what any good investigative reporter would do: she began filing FOIAs to find out exactly how much money the City of Richmond had actually spent on school facilities.

Then, like many others, Kenya began hearing rumors of a sort of domino effect that would soon be coming. As Don McEachin moved on to Congress, Jennifer MacLellan took his seat in the

State Senate, leaving her House of Delegates seat opened. Jeff Bourne, who at the time was the Third District School Board Representative, handily won that special election for the 71st District.

“As soon as I heard that Jeff Bourne would be moving into the General Assembly, I started to contemplate running for his seat on the School Board,” Kenya says.

What’s more, people began encouraging her to run for office. And as soon as she made the decision to go for it, Kenya hit the ground running. “I got a new pair of sneakers, and I personally knocked on doors in every precinct in the district,” she says. “When it was daylight, I was knocking on doors. We started in August, and I did it straight through till Election Day. It is all consuming, but I love talking to people. I will say this, though, running for office was the most all-consuming, exhausting thing I’ve ever done in my entire life. I have so much appreciation for everybody who does it.”

Although a newbie to the political game, Kenya was able to raise money, and she had a team of very committed volunteers working with her. She also used her skills in marketing, and friends would help with things like photography and design.

Kenya considers her first full year on the School Board. “I have been able to stay true to my goals of pushing to increase the trust in the school system through transparency and how we govern,” she says. “Decisions in terms of salary and structure should be a public discussion, and so I’m thankful that did happen. And on the work on our strategic plan, it was very important to me that we put emphasis on creating a school system that is open, and that teacher retention become a key part of that plan, as well, and so I’m thankful for that.”

But there are many challenges looming on the horizon. “Right now my focus is on the General Assembly, and I urge everyone to come with me to the rally on Monday January 28,” Kenya says. The Red for Ed rally is a statewide initiative organized by Virginia

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On the School Board in Richmond, Kenya plans to continue her efforts to secure more money for the city schools. "Part of the reason I got involved was to ask the Mayor and City Council for more funding, and we got some wins," she says. "But the level of need and the expectations continue to go up."

Kenya mentions some of the rationales that were used by politicians when they pushed through high-stake testing. "It was easier to say that teachers were not doing their jobs, which is not the case," she says. "I think that entire movement came from a desire to not fund education."

Kenya makes no bones about her opposition to the mayor's \$1.4 billion Richmond Coliseum proposal. "A lot of folks are frustrated that we're talking about rebuilding a Coliseum while our schools are falling apart," she says. "I don't see the logic behind that project. I like numbers, and the numbers don't add up, and the timing doesn't make sense, and the necessity for the project is questionable. We have so many needs in this city, and our priorities seem off?"

And it's not as if this were an anomaly. It's happened time and again throughout the city's recent history, from the failed Sixth Street Marketplace, to the absurd demolition a few years later of this structure that could have housed any number of businesses. In a more recent era there was the notion of building a ballpark in Shockoe Bottom, a boondoggle that was fortunately derailed. Not the case, unfortunately, with the city travesty known as the Bon Secours Washington Redskins Training Center.

"So the question is, why does this keep happening again and again?" Kenya asks. "I think the answer is in governance. What can we change in how the city is governed to ensure that the decisions that are made, and the priorities that are taken, reflect what we want? I really think we have to start there. We have more pressing needs than a Coliseum."

"Like schools?" I suggest

"Amen," says Kenya Gibson.

When I ask if she has further political ambitions, Kenya shakes her head.

But then she says this: "I didn't know I was going to go to architecture school. I didn't know that I'd be living in the heart of the Confederacy. Me, this gal from Boston. I didn't know that I'd become a PTA mom. So I've come to appreciate that you can't predict life. But I've got work to do on the School Board." **NE**

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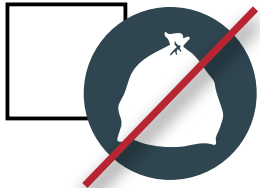
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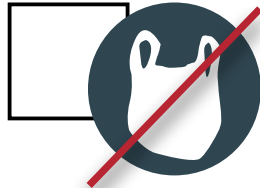
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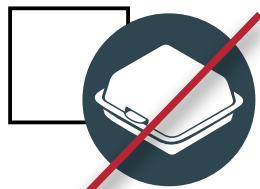
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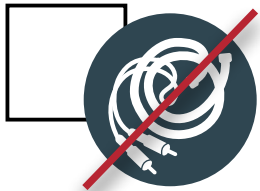
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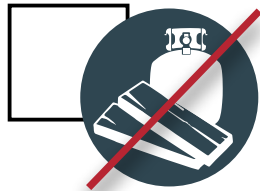
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Sheppard Street Tavern Fine Food and the Art of Conversation

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

GOD KNOWS HOW many lost souls gave up the ghost, in one form or another, in the Devil's Triangle. And how many fortunate ones today find safe harbor at the Sheppard Street Tavern. Though its address is on Park Avenue, its name reflects the cross street.

Owner David Bender smiles. "Richmond has a long history of that kind of thing," he says. "Boulevard Deli was on Broad Street. Hull Street Outlet is on Jeff Davis Highway. Grove Avenue Baptist Church is on Ridge Road and Parham. So, yeah, Sheppard Street Tavern is on Park Avenue."

It its first incarnation, it was called Caliente. "We opened on New Year's Day 2004," David says. "The build out took a year. It was a freaking nightmare. We hired the wrong contractor, and the city didn't make it easy. I was working part-time at Comfort, and my (former) wife was working at Joe's."

Like Sheppard Street Tavern, Caliente was a neighborhood restaurant and bar. They specialized in Cajun, Caribbean and Southern-inspired cuisine. But Caliente had not been David's first choice for a name. "I wanted to call it Hot and Bothered, but the neighborhood association fought me tooth and nail on that," David says. As they would when he applied for a permit to open up a patio, which quickly became one of the most popular drinking and dining spots in the Museum District.

He remembers what things were like in that two-block strip along Sheppard when he first opened the restaurant. "Forty percent of the buildings were vacant," David recalls. "There were broken windows. There was graffiti. There was litter all over the place. And one of the things a patio would do is put eyes on the street. And the more eyes out there, the less s***s gonna happen. Devil's Triangle used to be lined with Harley's between The Ritz and Café 21 and The Felix. You go to the Ritz, if you didn't have a gun or knife when you went in, they'd give you one." He laughs.

From almost the moment, Caliente opened, it was a success. "We rolled,"



says David. "I was in the kitchen, lunch and dinner, basically six days a week, twelve to eighteen hours a day. But we were rolling. We were making good food, keeping the bills paid, making money. And we had a lot of regulars. Some of them still come in today fifteen years later."

In some ways, it was no surprise that his restaurant was so popular. It merged two things that people crave—the company of others and fine food.

After earning a degree in psychology, and spending a dreadful year working in a residential facility for teenage delinquents, David decided on a different career path. "I hated that job at the residential facility," he says. "I would get a pit in my stomach a day before I had to go back to work, and I finally quit. Working there inadvertently drove me into the restaurant business."

His roommate at the time was cooking

at the Texas Wisconsin Border Café, so David asked if they had any openings. "They hired me on the spot," he says. "I worked there four years, from the late eighties till the early nineties. That's where I learned how to hustle, how to be a line cook. I learned timing. I learned communication with the other cooks."

David shifts his position in the chair, and brings his arms across the table. "It's all about timing, consistency and communication," he says. "In line-cooking you have a b***s-to-the-wall attitude. You have to know what the other cooks are doing, what's going to come up at what time. Everything has to be timed so it comes up together. You don't want your fries turning to mush while you're waiting for your burger to cook. The best line cooks never have to even talk to each other, because they know what the other one is doing."

When Border West closed, David went to work at Melito's Restaurant. "There

I learned how to cook, how to make specials, how to make sauces, how to make soups, how to cut steaks, how to trim fish, all the cooking skills that aren't line-cooking or prep-cooking, but actually creating," he says.

At Melito's he also learned more than a little bit about customer service. "A customer's special order was always done and never questioned," says David. "It didn't matter how busy you were, if a customer wanted a side of barbecue sauce somebody stepped off the line to make barbecue sauce."

Four years later, David moved on to further round out his skills. "I went to Graffiti Grille where I learned about fine dining," he says. "And they had a wide open kitchen right there in the middle of the dining room, so I had to learn to control my volume, control my words. It was a great place and great time to be there. And I learned how to cook duck and rack of lamb and nicer foods."

When Michelle Williams opened Europa Italian Cafe & Tapas Bar, she hired David as a sous chef. "I was there for close to a year, and again I learned to hustle," he says. "We had five or six people on the line at any one time."

And there was reason for this. Although tapas are small, they require a lot of work. "With Melito's you're doing a salad or an appetizer, and then an entree and sometimes a dessert," David explains. "With tapas, a four-top is gonna have a dozen different plates, and then some. On a busy night we turned out over four hundred covers."

At the end of his stint at Europa, he took his first plunge into restaurant ownership, and it would be something like coming full circle for David. He partnered with three seasoned veterans of the industry—Johnny Giavos, Mark Selahi, and Ernest von Ofenheim.

"The four of us bought the old Texas Wisconsin," says David. "That was 1998, and we ran it as Texas Wisconsin for a month or two, and then we closed it down to do some minor renovations, and opened it up as Border Chophouse."

The reception was okay, but The Chophouse wasn't breaking any re-



cards. "Let's just say we paid the bills," David says. "And what I couldn't understand was why people would wait forty-five minutes to an hour at Outback for a crappy steak, when for the exact same money, or even a little less, they could have a good steak with a baked potato and a salad and vegetables, a good steak properly prepared in an independent restaurant."

Three years later, David sold out his share of The Border Chophouse, and spent six months out in Telluride, Colorado. "I basically went out on sabbatical," he says. "I paid six months rent up front, and went out there with my snowboard and my CDs, and not much else. I was living four blocks from the nearest chairlift, and thirty miles from the nearest traffic light. I cooked three nights a week."

Shortly after he returned to Richmond, David got married and opened up Caliente.

He remembers how things were back then, and the sudden mushroom cloud explosion a few blocks to his north. "When we opened up, the only things in Scott's Addition were Moore Street Café, the Dairy Bar, and Sue's Country Kitchen," he says. "Now they've got the bowling alley, they've got the shuffle board bar, they have Bingo beer, they have eight or ten breweries, a meadery, two cideries, a distillery. I stopped counting at twenty-five."



A number of those places don't just offer food and tavern-fellowship. "They're entertainment venues, people want to be entertained when they go out now," he says.

Then there's the ever-present black mirror. "You can't go to a bar to have a conversation anymore, even if you want to" says David. "Because everyone else is on their phone. People are sitting across from each other and not talking because they're both looking down at their screens."

But that's not the case at Sheppard Street Tavern. When re-branding the restaurant, David even changed seating to encourage a more communal eating experience. "I took out the middle tables and put in two eight-top, high-top tables," he says. "And here's a daily occurrence: you'll have three people sitting at one end, and two more will sit at the other end, but the next thing you know, instead of being a party of three and a party of two, it's a party of five."

And as always, the food is extraordinary, the menu eclectic and ever-changing, and there's a joy David Bender feels anytime a customer voices their appreciation.

"There's a huge amount of pride when somebody comes up to the window and says, 'Dude, that was the best steak I ever had. You've got the best French fries,'" David says. "French fries. All they are are cut potatoes fried in grease. But over and over again people say, 'You've got the best fries in town.'"

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