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THE *Third District Race*

for North Side's representation on the Richmond School Board has been one of the hardest fought campaigns of its kind in years, in large part because our schools seem to be at a critical juncture. Years of lip service and lack of transparency have made it all but impossible for children to thrive in some of our public schools. After Jeff Bourne vacated his seat on the School Board to assume his role in the House of Delegates after a landslide victory, Cindy Menz-Erb was installed as the Third District's interim representative. At one point this summer there were six candidates vying for that seat—Dorian Daniels, Kenya Gibson, Joann Henry, Lathaniel Kirts, Kevin Starlings, and, of course, Cindy. Two of those dropped out earlier, but Kevin Starlings was still in the running at the time of a roundtable discussion conducted by North of the James. He has since withdrawn. Only three remain. Joann, Cindy and Kenya. And each one of these candidates has both expertise and passion about public schools and our children. *continued on page 14*





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NORTH OF THE JAMES

editor/publisher

CHARLES G. MCGUIGAN

art director

DOUG DOBEY at Dobby Design

account executive/sales manager

MARY ANNE CONMY

contributing writers

DALE M BRUMFIELD

BRIAN BURNS

ORION HUGHES

JACK R JOHNSON

ANDREW CHURCHER

ANNE JONES

CATHERINE MCGUIGAN

JUDD PROCTOR

FRAN WITHROW

contributing photographers

REBECCA D'ANGELO

editorial: charlesmcguigan@gmail.com

advertising:

maryanneconmyotjadvertising@gmail.com

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Richmond's Civil (and Un-Civil) War on Monument Avenue

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



Ground Zero, the Robert E. Lee Monument.

THINGS ARE HEATING up by eleven o'clock, mainly the temperature on this blue-sky morning in late summer. But tempers are rising as well. Sirens compete with the shrill of cicadas. I try to enter from the north side of Allen Avenue, but a Richmond police officer tells me I'm going to have to backtrack to Broad and make my way up Meadow.

Of course the objective is the Lee Monument. I talk with one of the dozen or so ACLU observers who all sport blue vests. "It's been very quiet," says John Wells. "There have been some protesters on the west quadrant and the east quadrant, but this north side has been very quiet. The turnout from the CSA (neo-Confederate States of America) seems to be small from what I've seen."

When I finally arrive on the median strip of the west quadrant there are the pro-Confederates, maybe twenty of them in all. Most of them left earlier. But the counter protesters, are still a few hundred strong. They stick it out. When the pro-Confederate out-of-towners left, they were replaced by home-grown white supremacists, mainly from the outlying counties. Most every one of them is packing a sidearm—9 mm revolvers, black guns in black holsters, some of them semi-automatic. These are the open-carry crowd, men who like showing off their weapons. There is not a gun among the counter protesters.

Several blocks are cordoned off by the police who are dressed in riot gear, padded as Michelin men, a small army of them. They're stern, but not confrontational even when BLM (Black

Lives Matter) activists begin berating them; the cops just stand their ground.

You can't get anywhere near the Lee Monument or even the rotary that surrounds it. Meadow Street, one block west of the statue, is flanked by massive cast-steel dump trucks from city maintenance and public works, I'm guessing. The cops aren't taking any chances. No repeat of the Nazi terrorist who killed a woman just a month ago in Charlottesville. Our cops may have taken a cue from Boston, which did things right. It's an essay in crowd control, something worthy of Disneyworld.

On the western quadrant, I encounter a couple from Tidewater Virginia. They're pro-Confederates, but their understanding of Civil War history seems to be somewhat skewed.

"I went to Robert E. Lee Elementary School in Hampton, Virginia," the woman tells me. "And they're wanting to change the name of my school, and now they're wanting to take down the statue. I think it's a crying shame."

"But you do understand the other point of view?" I ask.

"No, I don't," she says flatly.

"Because, if you read every single Confederate state's articles of secession, slavery was the primary states rights they were trying to preserve," I suggest.

"I disagree," the man says. "That has a lot to do with it, but it was trying to keep the Southern states from joining the Union. That's the main reason."

"But the Southern states were part of the Union," I say. "Robert E. Lee was trained at West Point, fought with valor in the U.S. Army during the Mexican American War."

"The South states was not part of the Union," he says defiantly. "Yes it had something to do with the slavery, I don't deny that."

"But the Southern states were part of the Union," I insist. "It was called the United States of America. It applied to every state in the country, north and south. Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox, in South Carolina was fighting on the same side as Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys up in Vermont. It was the same American Revolution."

"And they all ratified the Constitution," someone chimes in. "The original thirteen colonies. South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia."

This goes on for a couple minutes, back and forth, but these good people seem willfully opposed to historic fact, so the woman takes a different tack. It's *reductio ad absurdum* at its most elemental. She misses the point altogether.

"So all the statues where they own slaves should be taken down," she says, referring to George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, et al.

"Nobody ever said that," a counter protester says, shaking his head.

I nod, agreeing with the counter protester. "The reason the Confederacy was motivated was to preserve the institution of slavery," I say. "That is not the reason the American Revolution was fought."

"I disagree," the woman and man say in unison.

"You can disagree, but that is part of the historic record, and to deny it is like denying the existence of the noon day sun above us," I say.

This doesn't deter the woman. She continues her rant, which rapidly devolves into borderline incoherency.

The woman I talk with now, Elisheva Marks, holds a sign that says, quite simply, "Deport Nazis," and the woman standing beside her, Rachel Sattler, a friend of hers, holds a placard that states: "Virginia is for lovers, not racists." Elisheva is Jewish and has strong beliefs about the normalization of Nazis and white supremacists under the current presidential administration. She stares up at the statue of Lee mounted on Traveler.

"It's not about pro-Confederacy or whether you're for or against the statues being removed," says Elisheva. "It's the fact that we as Richmonders will make the decision. It's our decision; not these people coming in from another state. And it's not like these people have come here and said, 'Hey, we're here to see you and can we have a cup of coffee and talk about our differences?'" She takes umbrage with the open-carry types, and they're quite

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a few of them, and it is a little alarming to see them moving through the crowd with their guns and holsters as if this is the Old West or a war zone.

I talk with one of the gun-toters who got into a pretty heated argument with one of the counter protesters.

"I'm wondering why y'all are carrying guns?" I ask.

"Protection," he says.

"Protection from what? Have you actually been threatened by somebody today?"

"Yeah, on the other side, the Black Lives Matter guys," he says. "There were people surrounding us."

None of the Black Lives Matter protesters were carrying firearms.

Moving back to the east, I spot a large African-American man holding court. He's surrounded by about fifteen people, a couple of them compatriots. This African-American man, whose name is Ed, wears a TRUMP hat, a tent like black T-Shirt, dark glasses and a silver ring inscribed with this legend: U.S. Army. He speaks with the measured cadence of a preacher and he's sort of skirting a question posed by another

African-American man, who is asking him about statue of slave owner Robert E. Lee. He looks up to old Marse Lee high on his marble pedestal.

"Show me a slave owner?" says Ed. "They're not showing me any live slaveholders."

The crowd is, of course, talking about Robert E. Lee, but Ed keeps up his roundabout argument about living slaveholders.

"Do you support Robert E. Lee?" I ask.

"Yes," he says.

"Why do you support Robert E. Lee?"

"Because Robert E. Lee is part of Virginia, and part of the history of this state and this country," Ed tells me.

Then he begins talking about his own genes, saying he embraces just twenty-nine percent of his own DNA, the fraction of his physical being that is white and European. The crowd is silent for a few moments. A geneticist in the crowd, also African-American, asks Ed which haploid group he came from. Ed shrugs. He has no idea where his forbears came from outside of Ohio. "All I know is Virginia," he says.



Counter-protester Taleta Shabazz, a voice of reason.

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- All bagged leaves will be picked up between November 1 – November 11.

SECTOR 2 Thursday Trash Collection

- Leaves must be bagged by November 16.
- All bagged leaves will be picked up between November 16 – November 25.

SECTOR 3 Monday Trash Collection

- Leaves must be bagged by November 27.
- All bagged leaves will be picked up between November 27 – December 9.

SECTOR 4 Tuesday Trash Collection

- Leaves must be bagged by December 12.
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“All I know is Confederacy.”

“So what do you know about the Confederacy,” asks the geneticist.

“That it’s something black people of all people shouldn’t be protesting against,” Ed says.

It’s almost too much for some people in the crowd. They begin jeering and caterwauling, some of them finally breaking down in hysterics.

Ed is sounding more and more like a white supremacist. “I appreciate everything the white race has done for this country and the world,” he says. “I appreciate it. They only look at one thing, that’s all blacks and liberals look at. I look at it a different way. I appreciate everything that the white race has done for this country, and this world, and the people.”

“Get back in the fields, then,” a young African-American woman says. “Get back in the fields.”

Ed is undeterred. “What are you going to get in when you leave here?” he asks. “You gonna get in a car. Where you think that car came from? Have you ever flown in a plane, have you

ever heard of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina? You ever rode on a train?”

“So white people have invented everything?” says the young African-American woman.

“Did white people build the pyramids?” a white guy asks.

“Was Jesus white?” asks another.

Ed turns his attention to me suddenly.

“You see yourself in the mirror?” he says. “The majority of these black people hate you. You know why they hate you?”

“Tell me,” I say.

“Because you’re white.”

One African-American woman says, “We love you.” Another woman says, “We don’t hate you.”

Ed’s arguments become more and more delusional.

“Have you ever heard this term?” he asks. “The white man stole everything out of Africa. It’s a lie that’s been perpetuated.”

“Are you familiar with King Leopold the Second of Belgium?” I ask. “And are you aware of what he did in the Congo. He did take everything out

of Africa. He took the ivory and then the rubber. He enslaved the entire nation in the final years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century. He annihilated ten million Congolese. The first example of genocide in the twentieth century.”

“There’s nothing you can do about that,” says Ed.

Then he takes the final plunge down the rabbit hole where there is no reality, no semblance of truth, no regard for history. And it really makes your head spin.

“Have you ever heard who the master race is?” Ed asks. “Y’all ever heard that? Africans are the master race. I’m gonna put it to you this way. How could five guys with muskets take the whole continent? The master race had nothing but spears and blow darts. My point is, if they are the master race, how did they end up in last place?”

Listening to this man becomes tiring, so I move further to the east, toward a semi-circle of cops forming a crescent on the outer edge of the Lee Monument rotary. Here’s where I meet an imposing woman named Taleta Shabazz.

She is trim and dressed in black slacks, black T-shirt, black cap, black boots and dark glasses. Her lips are metallic blue. She is African-American, and she knows a thing or two about history. Just out of infancy in the 1960s Taleta watched riots on TV, saw black men and women being beaten because of the color of their skin.

“I’m from New York City, from the village of Harlem, I moved here more than twenty years ago, and I’ve never been to an event like this,” she says. “I don’t march and I don’t protest anything. However, I’ve been in this struggle since I was two years old. My first conscious thought was in front of a black-and-white, seven-inch Sony television with metal antennas. That’s the first time I realized there was a disparity between the colors and ethnicities, at which point I realized which side I was on clearly based on my genetic composition and my appearance.”

It’s refreshing to meet someone who understands our history, and does not distort truth.

“There’s a real issue with anyone who embraces this, because anybody with a

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FEATURE

brain understands that the Confederate soldiers fought against the Union soldiers in order to perpetuate slavery," she says. "We all know this, and these statues and these Confederate flags memorialize these fallen soldiers who lost a war. They were always on the side of wrong."

She looks around and stares down a group of gun-toting white supremacists, who have been listening to her words. "These monuments and flags seem to give them a sense of superiority," she says aiming her words at the pro-Confederates. "We've been on an un-level playing field for approximately five hundred years, perhaps longer than that, and it's about time that my future grandchildren will come into the world and not feel the oppression that I felt the day that I was born."

She considers her own son, a sweet, trusting young man, just twenty-five years old. "The thing about my son is that he has a beautiful soul and refuses to see my argument," says Taleta. "He thinks the world is just fine the way that it is because I've sheltered him and I've kept him close to me so no harm has ever come to him. He's never been in a situation where he's been outright offended, but my fear is that somebody might set their sights on him just because of the color of his skin. He does not recognize the danger."

When I ask what she thinks the monuments represents, Taleta is blunt.

"Oppression," she says.

"White supremacy," she says.

"Violence," she says.

Next, I run into a trio of young women who are handing out white silk roses, boutonnières with a message. Their names are Katy Johnson, Lauren Smith and Darian Carter-Pace. Lauren explains the significance of the roses.

"It was a counter protest of faculty and students at Munich University against Nazis prior to and leading up to the Second World War," she says. "Many of them were found out and died for their beliefs. We just thought it was a very symbolic double-entendre—a white rose that's a symbol of peace, and also a jab against neo-Nazis."

Darian Carter-Pace, who double majors in homeland security and journalism at Virginia Commonwealth University, has seen how Confederate memorials seem to attract Nazis and white supremacists, some of who are bent on violence.

"I wasn't for the removal of the monuments at first," says Darian. "But now because of the type of people who rally behind them I favor their removal."

She looks around her, at some of the white supremacists gathered on this




The General. Lee, horn plasting the first few bars of Dixie.

grassy median strip, men carrying guns. "If this is what these monuments evoke then they have to come down," Darian says. "There's a metaphor I heard someone use that goes like this, 'When a kid throws a tantrum about a toy, you don't give them the toy, you don't let them keep it, you take it away.' This is their toy, and so it's time to take it away."

Darian, who is African-American, is from Charlottesville and was witness to the violence and murder, the acts of outright terrorism, committed by the white supremacists who still pay homage to their counterparts from a bygone era.

"It was insane," she says. "The first torch-march that happened; I was terrified. I didn't think something like that could happen where I was from."

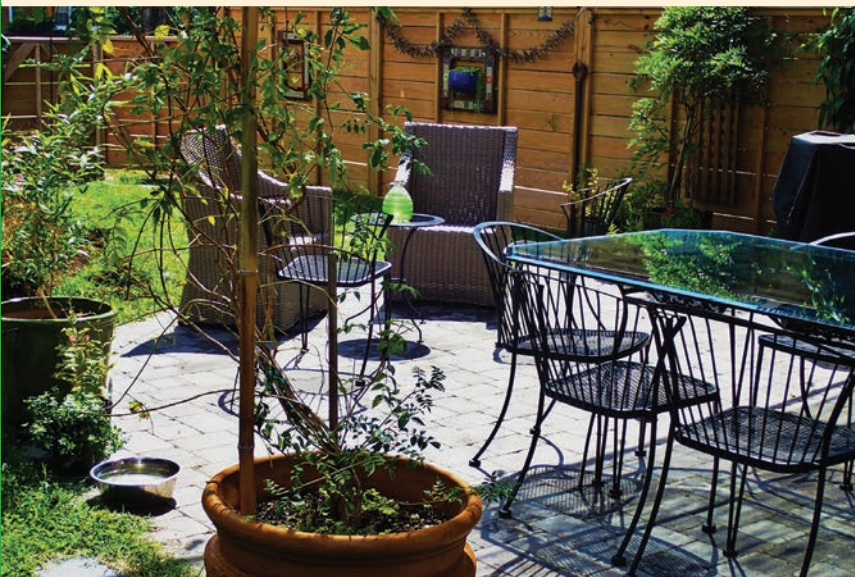
And at this moment I can't really believe that gun-toting white supremacists are gathered in the heart of the city I call home, the city I love. When these monuments were erected during the Jim Crow era, the incredibly well-to-do built homes along this broad boulevard that links the monuments. At that time, the monuments lent an air of prestige to the area.

But that time is long past. In anticipation of this protest, more than a few homeowners left the city, fearing possible violence for Charlottesville is still fresh in most people's memory. Another rally is planned in December, and folks are already worried. Fact is, these monuments are now flashpoints, attracting people who do not share the values of Richmonders. There may come a time when property values along Monument Avenue plummet because of the outdated monuments, and that may spur their removal. As I move past the dump truck barricades on Meadow, on my way back to my car, a couple of guys race south on Meadow, running the light on Monument, in a replica of the General Lee, the muscle car, an orange Dodge Charger, that figured prominently in "The Dukes of Hazzard". Repeatedly the two men driving this relic hit the horn, which bleats out the first twelve notes of "Dixie", and it sounds sad and small and out of touch. In a word: Pathetic. 

prx.org/pieces/215982-civil-war-on-richmond-s-monument-avenue

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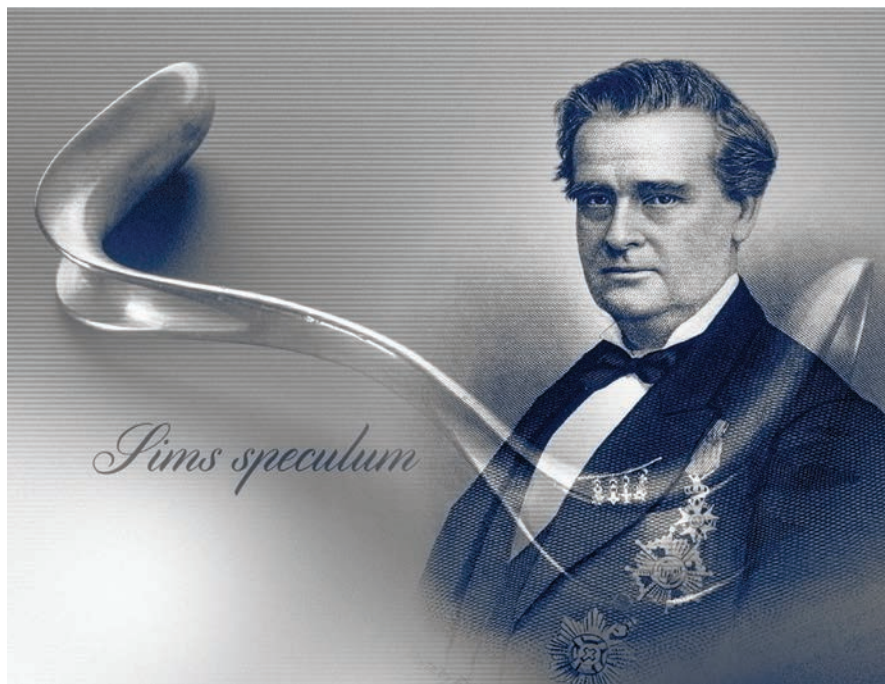
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HIDDEN HISTORIES

James Marion Sims The Father of Modern Gynecology

by JACK R JOHNSON



YOU'VE PROBABLY heard of Dr. Joseph Mengele, the Nazi doctor whose fascination with genetics led him to work with Jewish twins in Nazi concentration camps without anesthetics or consideration of their suffering. But have you heard of James Marion Sims, the American doctor who practiced his surgical techniques on un-anesthetized American slaves?

On the shady northwest corner of the statehouse grounds in Columbia, South Carolina, sits a monument dedicated to James Marion Sims. Like other statues from that era, it is made of bronze, shows a single man standing erect and looking relatively benign, a faint smile for those below. According to South Carolina activist, Wendy Brinker, it is one of the largest statues on the site. A panel for the statue reads, "The first surgeon of the ages in ministry to women, treating alike empress and slave." On the panel to the right, the inscription continues, "He founded the science of gynecology, was honored in all lands and died with the benediction of mankind."

Indeed, J. Marion Sims is sometimes heralded in current medical text books as the father of modern gynecology, but Sims' use of 14 enslaved African-American women as experimental subjects without anesthesia over the

course of four years, has been regarded by many modern historians as highly unethical. According to Diana E. Axelson, writing in "Women as Victims of Medical Experimentation: J. Marion Sims' Surgery on Slave Women, 1845-1850", between 1845 and 1849, Sims experimented by surgery on 14 enslaved women with fistulas, brought to him by their masters in Montgomery, Alabama. Sims took responsibility for their care on the condition that the masters provide clothing and pay taxes. He named three enslaved women in his records: Anarcha, Betsy, and Lucy. Each suffered from fistula, and all were subjected to his surgical experimentation. From 1845 to 1849 he experimented on each them several times, operating on Anarcha 13 times before her fistula repair was declared a success.

Although anesthesia had recently become available (as of 1846), Sims did not use any anesthetic during his procedures on the slaves. According to Sims, black people did not feel as much pain as white people, and thus did not require anesthesia when undergoing surgery. Other evidence points to a general disregard for the safety, much less the humanity, of the slaves he was treating.

In an article published by Sims on the subject of tetanus, he makes clear his personal views of blacks: "Whenever there are poverty, and filth, and laziness,

or where the intellectual capacity is cramped, the moral and social feelings blunted, there it will be oftener found. Wealth, a cultivated intellect, a refined mind, an affectionate heart, are comparatively exempt from the ravages of this unmercifully fatal malady. "Since he attributed the cause of the disease to the moral weakness of the enslaved Africans, he never suggested the need to improve their living conditions.

Yet, it's apparent from his writing that he understood the pain the women suffered. In a memoir he stated that "Lucy's agony was extreme...she was much prostrated and I thought she was going to die". It should be noted that he did administer opium to the women after their surgery, which was accepted therapeutic practice of the day—this had the benefit of easing their pain and probably was conducive to their healing as well.

L. Lewis Wall, a doctor and professor at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, defends Sims saying, "Sims's modern critics have discounted the enormous suffering experienced by fistula victims." He argues that based on this, slaves would have gladly undergone surgery for relief. "The evidence suggests that Sims's original patients were willing participants in his surgical attempts to cure their affliction—a condition for which no other viable therapy existed at that time." He also noted that Sims's failure to use anesthesia on his black patients in the 1840s was not necessarily racist: "Acceptance [of anesthesia among doctors at the time] was not universal, and there was considerable opposition to its introduction from many different quarters, for many different reasons."

But according to the NPR report, "Remembering Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey: The Mothers of Modern Gynecology," it was only after his success in early experiments on the enslaved women that Sims attempted the procedure on white women with fistulas. For the surgery on white women, records show, he received the permission of his patients, and he used anesthesia. **NJ**

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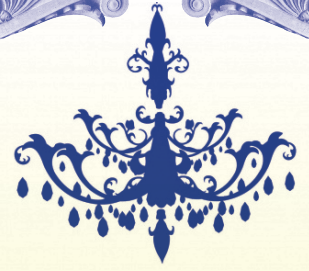
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Third District School Board Race

CLEANING THE 17TH FLOOR OF CITY HALL



SEATED AROUND THE ELLIPTICAL TABLE

in the conference room at Stir Crazy the four candidates then competing for Richmond's Third District School Board seat in a special election this November stayed in a relatively stable orbit around the main theme of public education. One of them, Kevin Starling, would drop out of the race two weeks after this roundtable discussion so his comments have been eliminated from this piece. For more than two hours the discussion revolved around the table, and what became increasingly clear as the candidates spoke their minds was how every one of them was both informed and passionate. It is a shame that all of them can't be elected; each would serve our city schools well. But only one of the remaining three—Joann Henry, Cindy Menz-Erb, or Kenya Gibson—will represent the Third District. Whoever wins will inherit challenges that have stymied past School Boards. To actually effect change there will need to be an overhaul of an entrenched bureaucracy because, like it or not, it seems all but impossible to clean the 17th floor of City Hall, and to remove deadwood administrators from some of our public schools—ineffective principals and their assistants. Whichever candidate wins will need industrial-strength cleaning agents and a willingness to scrub hard at the grime of a bureaucracy that has gone unchecked for decades. Each candidate was first asked her qualifications.

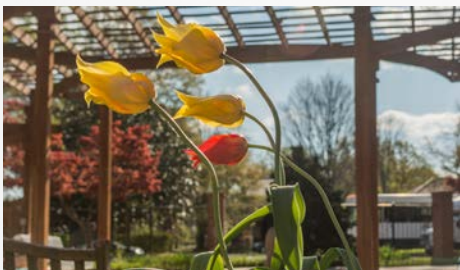
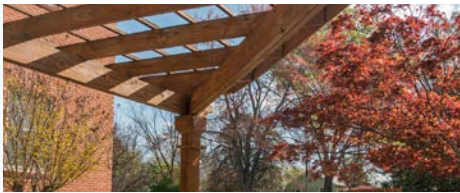
KENYA GIBSON

"I live in Bellevue; I've been here for about ten years," says Kenya Gibson. "I've got two kids in the public schools. My qualifications to hold the office are my role as an advocate. I've had a student in Richmond Public Schools for seven years and in that time I've made it my priority to be an advocate that is informed and involved. I really want to be part of the solution. I've been active in the PTA and that happened as a result of the advocacy piece. Folks saw that I was working with other advocates in the city on public education stuff, and they were looking for more folks to get involved, and so I signed on."

One of the things Kenya advocated for was salary decompression. Simply put this refers to a practice in the Richmond schools where new teachers are hired on at similar and, in some cases, higher rates than veteran teachers in the city. "Through our efforts we were able to get the two-year salary decompression, which was really important," says Kenya. "We had teachers with nine years of experience that were on the same pay scale as teachers with one year experience."

Other qualifications include Kenya's own upbringing. "I went to public schools," she says. "My parents sent me to integrated schools, and I went to schools in urban areas that were magnet programs when we

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PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO



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lived in suburban areas. We lived in a mixed-income development in a very elite suburb of Boston that had busing. Integrated schools had been something that I was raised with and I attribute that to my success in life.” Kenya went college at Yale University and the University of William and May. She studied architecture, economics and fine arts. “I really believe my success in life has come through the experience that I had in public schools,” she says. “I had great teachers and a very strong curriculum, but in addition to that were the relationships I developed with folks, kids that I had a lot in common with and kids that I didn’t have anything in common with. I think we really underestimate the importance of that, the fact that we’re not just shaping kids to take tests, we’re shaping them to become citizens. As an adult now, I’m able to get along with all kinds of folks and I attribute that to the background I had.”

JOANN HENRY

“I am a product of Hopewell, Virginia,” says Joann Henry. “I graduated from Hopewell High School, and I think education was my destiny.” After graduation, Joann went to work as a secretary in the Richmond Public Schools. “I was the first secretary to the director of federal programs,” she says. “Our department was responsible for grant writing to bring all different kinds of programs into the school system.”

She received her bachelor’s in business education, and her master’s in business education, and administration and supervision from Virginia State University. Joann later earned her doctorate in education leadership from Nova Southeastern University in Florida.

Throughout the years, she has worked in the Richmond Public Schools. “I started teaching in 1992 at Armstrong (High School) and during that time I used to take students on field trips and raised money to take them to Europe,” says Joann. “I taught children how to be entrepreneurs, and I created a remediation program.”

She later moved on to an administrative position. “I was assistant principal at Armstrong, and we were accredited until I left,” Joann says. “As assistant principal I created a school called Twilight Academy where students could get on their right grade level.”

CINDY MENZ-ERB

Cindy Menz-Erb has lived in Richmond for just a little over a year, and her oldest daughter just started at Holton Elementary School this fall. Yet of

all the candidates, she is the only one who has experience on the Richmond School Board. Cindy, who grew up in New Jersey, holds a bachelor’s in communications and a master’s in community development.

Before she tells me a bit about herself, she clarifies an incident that has been talked about quite a lot. “When I heard that David Hudson was looking to move to Franklin Military (Academy), I did go in and suggest that Henderson (Middle School) might be another option if he was looking for a new challenge,” she says. “As a parent I was sad to see him go, but as a School Board member I am very, very glad that he stayed within the system because we tend to lose principals to the counties, and I’m real excited about what he’s going to do at Franklin Military. Just to clarify though, I didn’t have any conversations with him prior to him applying for and interviewing for the position at Franklin.”

“My last full-time job was as an executive director of a non-profit that supported families with young kids to help them stabilize and ultimately get out of poverty,” says Cindy. “The work we did was focused on kids zero to five for a couple of reasons. One, because early developmental years are so, so vital for kids, and so we worked with parents to help them stabilize during that really critical early development time. And two, by the time kids get to school, by the time they enter kindergarten, either they’re ready for school and on track or not, and if they’re not, getting them on track is really challenging for public school systems across the board. If they’re living in poverty at five years old, it is highly likely statistically that they will be adults in poverty.”

“Prior to that I worked for an organization that did training for parents and kids and teachers together to help bridge the divide between what was happening in their home and what was happening in school buildings to attempt to build a stronger home-school connection,” she says. “While I was with that organization I worked with a collaboration that won \$23 million to the City of New York. During that time I worked with a hundred middle and high schools across New York that were in pretty high poverty neighborhoods.”

These work experiences have helped her a great deal as an appointed representative. “It has been really helpful in the last six or seven months since I’ve been on the School Board,” says Cindy. “I have also had an intensive

KENYA GIBSON



learning experience in the last six months. I think I have learned quite a bit, but I don’t pretend that I know more than I do, or that I have history in the Richmond public Schools that I don’t have.”

TRANSPARENCY

of government seems to be on the minds of many Richmonders these days. When I ask about the recent secretive removal of Superintendent Dana Bedden, Kenya says: “I was disappointed about the change in the superintendent leadership. The timing was poor, and now we’re under state scrutiny with the memorandum of understanding.”

Cindy, who had just been serving on the School Board for under a month, was in a closed door session with other board members. “When that conversation was broached, I recused myself from the conversation in the closed session because I didn’t have enough experience,” she says. “What I voted for was an approval of the contract. I recused myself and voted to approve the contract that he (Bedden) also signed. Part of my responsibility is to not talk about closed session items in the public.”

Looking forward, Cindy hopes the School Board will soon hire what she calls an “awesome” superintendent. “And we’re going to give him or her the ability to do what they need to do to make progress,” she says. “I think

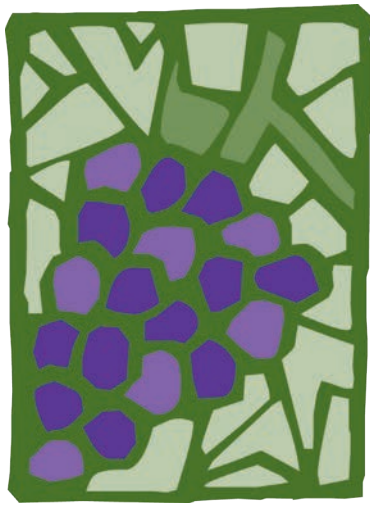
we need to give somebody some room to come in once we hire somebody to say we need some radical change and we need to give them some space to do that.”

When asked if she endorsed Paul Goldman’s Fulfilling the Promise of Equal Educational Opportunities Referendum, which will be on this November’s ballot, Cindy shakes her head. If the referendum is approved, Richmond’s mayor would be directed to produce, within six months, a plan for fixing the city schools without raising taxes.

“It’s clear that a lot of people want to prioritize facilities, and I believe that we need to listen to the voters on that,” Cindy says. “I think the referendum is complicated, and I don’t actually love it being boiled down to a binary choice. That being said, what I don’t want to do is tie the hands of our government in any way. I think we need to put all things on the table to ensure that we can fund schools. That’s what I think. I do think that we need to prioritize facilities. I want to make progress. I don’t want to do anything that ties our hands on that.”

Joann favored the referendum from the beginning. “We worked hard getting the signatures for that referendum,” she says. “We got 6,600 signatures (well over half the signatures required) in the first twenty-four hours.”

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Kenya sounds tired of excuses. “As it pertains to the charter change,” she says of the referendum. “My thoughts are that it is unconventional, but I think we need to address this because we’re in a place where we’ve talking about plans for over a decade, and nothing is happening. I am in favor of the referendum.”

I next ask the three candidates what each will do if elected.

JOANN HENRY

“First of all, I would be representing the Third District, and I would like to see the IB program as well as the STEM program in our district,” says Joann. “Also, I would like to improve Ginter Park, Henderson, John Marshall, and the Tech Center.”

“We must improve because the Tech Center because students are going there, but they aren’t prepared when they leave to get a career and to be certified with a skill,” she says. “So we have to look at those programs. Henderson and Ginter Park have been failing for several years, and we’ve got to get in and fix those schools. You do not start remediation in January pre-

paring them for SOLs; you start two weeks after school opens. And you keep looking at your data to track the student’s success.”

Joann pauses briefly and then resumes. “Before our school system can get on the right track, we need to remember it’s about our students,” she says. “You know, the most important people in a school system are the teachers and the students. Those are the important people, but for some reason we’re forgetting that because we are mistreating our teachers.”

And then she takes aim at Central Office. “We have people downtown in administration, and they’re getting paid nice money,” says Joann. “They know that when they see data about nineteen schools being unaccredited they need to go out there to try to help those principals and teachers in those schools to make them better because that’s what we’re paying them for. You go out there and make those schools better.”

Joann also believes the school district needs to begin promoting administrators from within. “What I’m say-

CINDY MENZ-ERB



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ing is, we have our assistant principals in these schools,” she says. “When a principal says, ‘I am leaving,’ bring up another assistant principal. Because Richmond Public Schools send their assistant principals to University of Richmond and they train them, and then put them back in the school system. Yet they bring in principals from outside of the system. These assistant principals have been in this system for over five years. They should be the ones moving up.”

CINDY MENZ-ERB

“Talent is one of the most important things we have,” Cindy says. “I think we need to be graduating kids that are ready for college and careers, and we’re graduating a huge number of kids that are not ready for either, with diplomas that are worth nothing. And so I think that needs to be our focus. I think the Tech Center is doing good work. I think it’s underutilized. I think we should be thinking about our high schools across the board as specialty schools, and driving kids to things they’re interested in. That kids are able to be on whatever track they’re interested in, and it doesn’t necessarily pigeonhole them, but it gives

them a lot of opportunity to try new things, to be driven, to be engaged.”

“I think we need to hire a chief talent officer who reports directly to the superintendent,” she continues. “We need somebody who is going to think more strategically about talent. This person would create a much more strategic plan for recruitment of teachers, principals and assistant principals. It has to happen year-long, and it needs to be more creative. We need to build a pipeline for principals like what Dr. Henry was talking about where we’re actually training APs. And training teachers who want to go on the leadership track.”

When she considers equity in the schools across the city, Cindy believes it all starts with the school’s tone-setter. “I think we start with ensuring that every school has an incredible, qualified, talented principal,” she says. “I think we have a few good principals, but we need to ensure that we have awesome principals in every single building, because when you have awesome principals then you have great teachers, and they stay. Holton’s a great example of that. I think we

have to revolutionize how we’re doing HR and talent.”

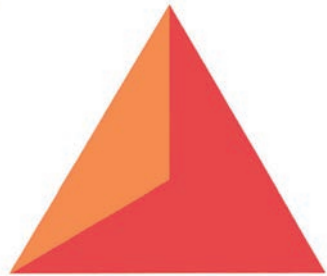
“I would also focus on building 21st century facilities with equity across the board, and focusing on culture and climate,” says Cindy. “Things like providing restorative justice mechanisms instead of just kicking kids out of school. We’re suspending and expelling at unfortunate rates. I am not an expert in restorative justice, but I do want to bring some of those programs into our schools, because I think that we could be doing a far better job of helping kids learn to cope. We also need to provide more supports outside of the school buildings, and a stronger connection between out-of-school time and what’s happening in the school building. We need to have after-school programs for all families.”

KENYA GIBSON

“There’s the piece of culture, and I think that needs to be addressed through relationship and community, because we are talking about people,” Kenya says. “I don’t believe we’ll be able to move the needle without bringing the community along with us, and having

those difficult conversations that we’ve avoided. Whether we should have specialty schools in the city, or whether we should have programs that might draw in middle-class families, or how to address the transportation issue, or what is the procedure in place for promoting folks, because these things are not black and white. When we come in and make changes and we don’t communicate that down, folks don’t come along with us. So it doesn’t matter how brilliant an idea is. We need to be all on the same page in order to make anything happen.”

“From a more academic perspective this is one of the things that is close to my heart,” says Kenya. “Exceptional education. Things are changing about how we educate kids. It’s not about how we educate the traditional learner. We need to get that right. When I was talking about pulling middle-class families in, I really believe that the opportunity there is with exceptional education. Specialty schools? They have them all over. But I can tell you what they also have all over. Frustrated parents who aren’t able to get their kids the accommodations



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that they need in the system. A lot of the frustration is in the identification piece. We have small, tight boxes the state has identified, and as such it becomes a challenge to figure out which box your kid fits in, and as you're going through that process we're missing opportunities to be able to address the needs that are there. And many of those support systems or accommodations are not just good for a kid with special needs, they're good for every kid."

Then Kenya talks about something that has always been sorely lacking in education.

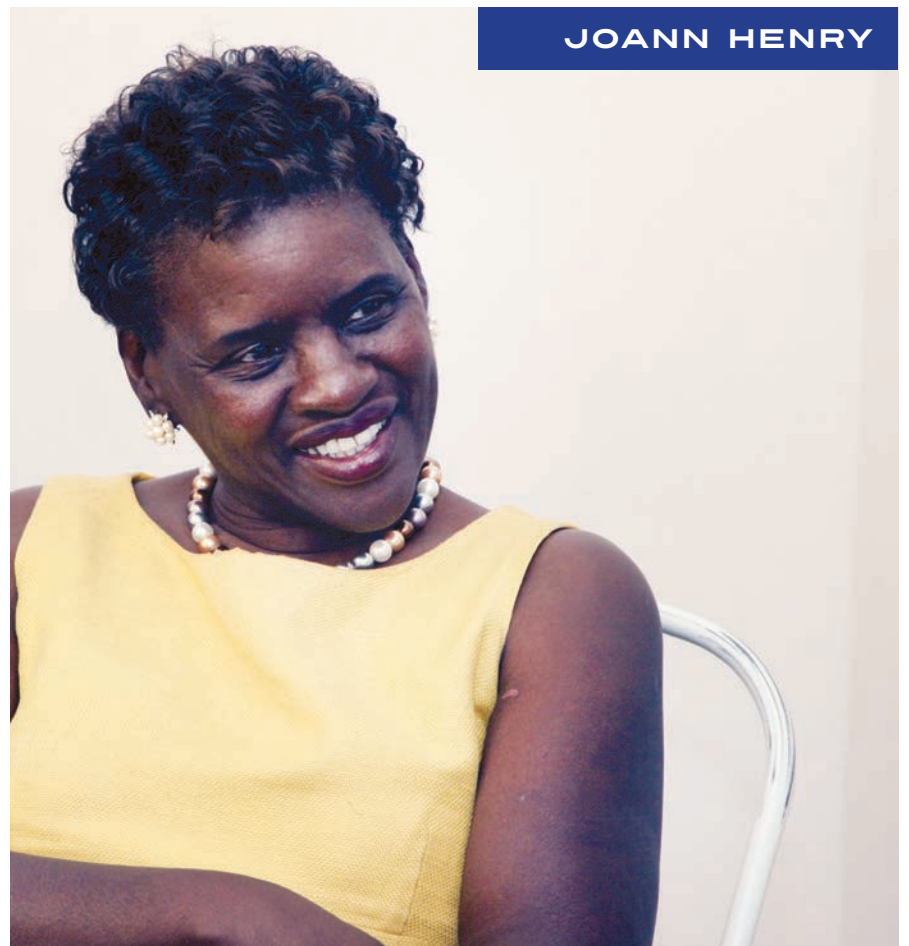
"It's important that we teach our kids social justice," she says. "I don't know that Henrico would be open to teaching social justice, or Hanover, or Chesterfield, though these counties have areas that have schools with poverty very similar to the schools that we have in Richmond."

And to that end, our schools should celebrate and accept what is uniquely Richmond. "We are never going to be a Henrico, or a Hanover, or a Chesterfield," says Kenya. "So rather than try

to become something that we are not, how can we maximize who we are, and really embrace the multicultural diversity of our school system."

Parents need to set examples for their children. "I think that's what we challenge parents with," Kenya says. "Reach out to people you don't know. I think it's important to look at the history. As a PTA leader one of my goals was to grow the engagement in our school so I read up. Interesting to find out there used to be two Richmond PTA organizations, back in the fifties. There was an African-American PTA, and then there was a white PTA, and eventually the African-American PTA was absorbed by the white PTA. So when we talk about the fact that families of color may not be engaged with the PTA, we have to acknowledge that there is history. I think we have to also appreciate the fact that the American dream is based on the reality that regardless of your parents, or who your parents were, we will provide the opportunity for you to be able to succeed. And I think that that's the key." **NJ**

JOANN HENRY



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BOOK REVIEW

Saving Our Planet Despite Trump

by FRAN WITHROW

DESPITE WHAT Trump might say, I firmly believe we are in the midst of climate change, and I was heartbroken that he refused to sign the Paris Climate Agreement. But I felt renewed hope for the earth when I read Newfoundland research scientist Brett Favaro's "The Carbon Code: How You Can Become a Climate Change Hero."

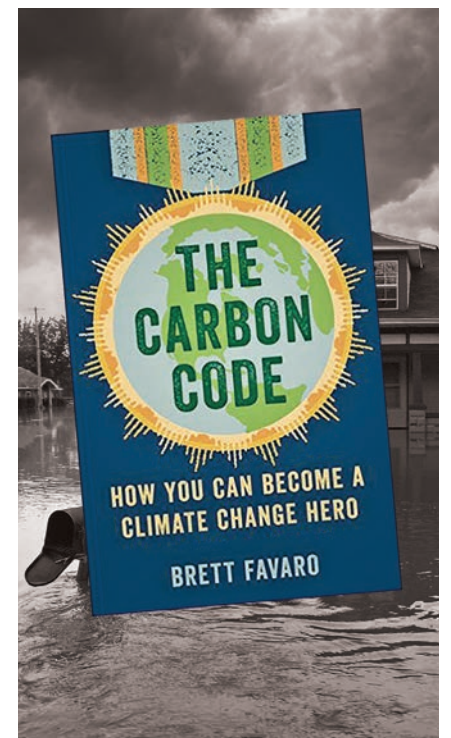
Never have I come across such a clear and readable explanation for what climate change is and how it occurs. Favaro tells all in a way that even a non-scientist like me can understand. Then he discusses how each of us can reduce our impact, both individually and politically.

Thinking about how we as individuals can reduce our carbon footprint and combat climate change feels impossible. But Favaro assures us that climate change heroes are everywhere, and together, our small contributions really can make a world of difference. He emphasizes that we in developed countries can take action without feeling deprived. But we've got to get going, he says, because time is running out.

Favaro discusses specific, doable ways to minimize our carbon footprints by creating a "carbon code of conduct," consisting of four "Rs." (I must confess I found it difficult to remember them: they are too similar to "reduce, reuse, recycle." But the suggestions still make a lot of sense.)


One way to reduce carbon usage is to eat less beef, because cows themselves are enormous carbon emitters. (And of course raising them takes a heavy toll on the earth as well.) You could take the train instead of the plane as a way to replace carbon intensive activities. (Always think lower and slower in terms of less carbon intensive transportation. Hm. I better get out my bike.) If you combine a business trip with a vacation, you are refining your activities in order to get the most benefit out of them. And we need to rehabilitate the atmosphere, which could be accomplished by purchasing carbon credits.

The book is full of thought-provoking



ideas. Did you know the most carbon efficient car to drive is probably the one you already have? It takes a tremendous amount of energy to build a new car, so hold onto your old one. Favaro also talks extensively about electric cars that require no fossil fuels to operate as the most energy efficient means of travel. And don't get him started on cruise ships: they use massive amounts of carbon with every trip.

Finally, Favaro talks about how we can advocate for climate change politically. With our current White House administration, this may be the most challenging obstacle facing us, but it is vital that we urge our members of Congress to support legislation aimed at combatting climate change.

Becoming a climate change hero needs to happen now, and the carbon code "does not require perfection." But it does require a commitment from each one of us. Favaro quotes Rumi to sum it all up: "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself." 

The Carbon Code: How You Can Become a Climate Change Hero
by Brett Favaro
Johns Hopkins University Press
\$22.95
232 pages



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Final Gravity Celebrates Two Years Plans to Expand Further at Towne Center

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

FINAL GRAVITY, ON September 16, celebrated its second full revolution around the sun with a day of food, music, and, of course, Tony Ammendolia's award-winning craft beers brewed on Lakeside Avenue in Richmond's North Side.

Throughout the day, until early evening, hundreds gathered inside the brewery at the Lakeside Towne Center, and many hundreds more enjoyed the event behind the brewery, where there were two premium food trucks—Go Go Vegan Go and Curbside Creations—dishing out fine cuisine, along with music provided by DJ's PJ Sykes and Melissa Koch, and Mighty Joshua, an independent reggae artist.

Throughout the day, people sampled a number of Final Gravity's special limited releases, including, Foggy Notion, Gold Foil, and, my particular favorite, Dark Matter, but they could also quaff some of the brewery's long enduring favorites like Stepping Stone, Venus Rising, and The Doppler Effect.

There were also guest taps available from other craft beer breweries including Ardent Craft Ales, Triple Crossing Brewing, The Answer Brewpub, among others.

Final Gravity also sold a limited (200 bottles) first-time bottle release of a Brett wheat ale, along with a limited release of 100 Boom box Spaceman 16-ounce glasses.

I caught up with owner and master brewer Tony Ammendolia as he moved through the crowd, playing host to hundreds. He was very pleased with the amount of people who have joined the celebration, and thankful for the many volunteers who helped him host the event. "I couldn't have done it without them," he said.

The success of Henrico's first micro-brewery was almost instantaneous. From the time Tony tapped his first keg, customers appeared. Four years before Final Gravity opened, there was Original Gravity, the beer-brewing and wine-making shop, which is still an integral part of the business.



Now, with the increased volume of his brewery business, Tony plans to expand his operation once again, renting yet another space in Peter Francisco's Lakeside Towne Center.

"With the amount of people we're serving at the brewery, we sometimes don't give our home-brewing customers the attention they deserve," Tony told me.

To that end, sometime before the holidays, Tony plans to take over 6116-B Lakeside Avenue, right next door to the brewery, which is currently part of Pass It On Consignment. Home-brewing and wine-making supplies will be sold out of that storefront, under the banner of Original Gravity, giving Final Gravity Brewing the additional space it desperately needs.

"We keep expanding when we need to," Tony said. 

Final Gravity/Original Gravity
11-7, Tues & Wed; Thurs, 11-9; Fri
& Sat 10-9; Sun, 11-6
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Patrons enjoy a perfect day in Lakeside as Mighty Joshua supplies the vibe.

RAINBOW MINUTES

by BRIAN BURNS and JUDD PROCTOR



Standing Tall Before Stonewall

WHILE MANY credit the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York as the spark that ignited the nation's gay rights movement, pride and courage did not start at Stonewall. The transgender communities in Los Angeles, Philadelphia and San Francisco were at the front in fighting back against police harassment and arrests.

The transgender community stood tall in May of 1959 at Cooper's Donuts on Main Street in Los Angeles. Then, in April of 1965, they, along with others, were denied service at Dewey's lunch counter in Philadelphia for wearing "non-conformist clothing." The transgender community fought back in San Francisco in 1966 at the two-day riot at Compton's Cafeteria and in 1967 in Los Angeles at the Black Cat Bar.

Donuts Fly at Cooper's Donuts

The transgender community has fought back against police brutality since at least May of 1959. It all started at Cooper's Donuts on Main Street in Los Angeles. This coffeehouse style establishment stayed open all night and was situated between two gay bars in a rough section of town. It attracted a mixed crowd of drag queens, male hustlers, many Latinos or African American and their acquaintances.

Police often patrolled the area demanding identification, and looking for IDs that didn't match their name or gender designation. Arrest often followed.

On this night they fought back, hurling donuts, coffee cups and trash at the police, forcing them into their squad cars as those inside poured into the street, dancing around the trapped police.

This would not be the last time they fought back.


Filmmaker, Barbara Hammer

Internationally-recognized as a film artist who's created over 80 films and videos, Barbara Hammer is considered a pioneer of lesbian-feminist experimental cinema.

Born in Hollywood in 1939, she made her first film, "Schizy" in 1967 about her own coming out process. Her 1974 short, "Dyketactics," is considered the first film celebrating lesbian love to be created by a lesbian.

Her 1988 documentary, "The Female

Closet," exhibits her continued interest in recovering the hidden histories of lesbians, bisexuals and gays in Western culture.

With her 16-millimeter films in the 70s, video in the 80s, web-based projects in the 90s and later digital video, Hammer wanted her audiences to "leave the theater with fresh perceptions and emboldened to take active and political stances for social change in a global environment." 

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MUSIC

Stir Crazy Cafe Winter Music Series Kickoff October 19th



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STIR CRAZY CAFE Winter Music Series Kickoff featuring Liz Nance and Russell Lawson from 6 till 8 pm. Also come meet the artists and artisans who make your favorite products sold at Stir Crazy.

Liz Nance & Russell Lawson began playing as a duo in 1996 and perform locally at clubs, restaurants, special events, weddings and private parties. They perform a wide variety of styles from standard and pop to gospel, jazz and folk. Their audiences say the blending of male and female voices in clear layered harmonies with the acoustic sound of stringed instruments creates their unique sound.

You're just as likely to hear an Indigo Girls composition or an Eagles cover as a Gershwin classic or a Broadway show tune when they perform.

Liz Nance has sung professionally for over 25 years in North Carolina, Richmond and Washington, DC. Since returning to Richmond in 1994, she formed the duo, appeared in Back to Bacharach and David (a musical re-

vue), released two CDs, sang as a Section Leader in the Parish and West Gallery Choirs for St. James's Episcopal Church including a week-long residency at Gloucester and Canterbury Cathedrals in England, and performed frequently as a soloist for weddings.

Russell Lawson has been playing and singing since the 1960s. He composes originals, both secular and sacred, and a number of his tunes evoke his roots in the South Carolina's Low Country. Russell is a member of the Songwriters Guild of America, the Virginia Organization of Composers and Lyricists and the Americana Music Association. He sings and plays around Richmond with Oak Lane Acoustic Music, Liz Nance, solo or with his best friend, David Berry. He sang in the bass section of the West Gallery Choir at St. James's Episcopal Church for 19 years and is a member of the choir's Guitar Ensemble.

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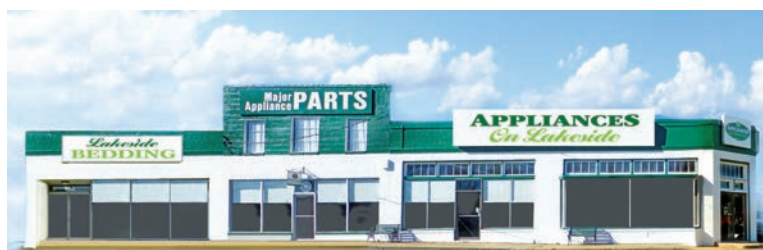


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