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Susan Frerichs & Will Armstrong

They're nomadic artists of a sort who work a circuit of shows around the country. At times they do they do the shows in tandem, at other times they're solo acts. During the dark months of the year they work away in their respective studios to create art for the coming months of light. One works in two-dimensions with the most common of substances—paper; the other works in three-dimensions with the rarest of elements—precious metals. But they are united in their art and their love in the place they call home in Bellevue. *continued on page 12*

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH by REBECCA D'ANGELO

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Machine Era

Designed and Machined in the USA

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

MACHINE ERA IS a relatively small shop tucked in the corner of a much larger building that houses Wellborn and Wright in that swath of an industrial park on Carolina Avenue just off Laburnum.

Ryan Shoemaker and Adam Hogsett stand on either side of a massive machine that dominates the shop. In a way, this computerized lathe/mill transmutes lesser metals into gold. Sort of. Twelve-foot bars of solid brass, stainless steel or anodized aluminum are fed into one end of the machine and transformed on the other end into pens that retail for \$65 each.

The business partners met as employees at Tektonics Design Group; Adam as a fabricator, Ryan as a machinist. By then each of them had a good working knowledge of the ways in which metal can be worked into utilitarian forms.

Ryan's interest in metal fabrication goes back to his high school days in Roanoke, Virginia.

"I attended a magnet school there that offered metal working," he says. "I learned all kinds of stuff. It was mainly sheet metal and welding."

Many of the pieces he and his classmates created in high school were farm implements. "Our shop teacher owned a farm in West Virginia," says Ryan. "And most of the projects we did were stuff for his farm. Things like trailers."

While still in high school, Ryan had a revelation. "I just learned real quickly that everything around you somehow starts in a machine shop" he says. "Everything. So I was like, 'Man I can make whatever I want with two machines—a mill and a lathe.' I really wanted to learn how to do that."

To that end, even before graduating, Ryan went to work at Salem Precision Machine. Before his senior year he was already honing his skills as a machinist. After moving to Richmond, he worked at a number of machine shops around town before settling in at Tektonics Design Group.

Adam's track was different. He began



Ryan Shoemaker and Adam Hogsett, co-owners of Machine Era.

his career as an electrician. "I did that for five years," he says. "I went through the schooling and everything." All was going well until the market tanked. "It was right during the bank crash, and we pretty much exclusively did work for banks in Richmond," says Adam. "We did all the work for Sun Trust and then things went bad, and the company went under."

Without steady employment, Adam began to do something he had always been interested in. "I always wanted to learn about metal working," he says. "So I bought a welder and self-taught for about six months and then got a job at Tektonics and that's where I met Ryan."

While employed by Tektonics, Adam worked on numerous projects from architectural features and aluminum furniture to the stainless steel bridge at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. "I was doing the fabrication side," he says. "Welding and metal finishing were two of the main things I did. I did a lot of sanding."

About eight years ago, a friend of Adam's who worked at Need Supply in Carytown asked him to come up with a design for bottle opener. "Need wanted a cool men's accessory," Adam says. "So we went back and forth on different designs." One stood out from all the rest, and the internet gobbled them up. "After we posted it," Adam explains. "It got picked up by some gear bugs and got spread around. We

used to sell a lot of them. They were made of carbon steel."

Then Adam decided to build an even better mousetrap. He designed another bottle opener, asked Ryan to machine the product, and the Key Square was born.

"I had machined some bottle openers for him in the past, and so I started doing these," says Ryan. "Then Adam did it on Kickstarter, and we were talking like, 'If it does really good we'll buy a machine and start machining these things.'" Within a month they had raised about \$80,000 on Kickstarter, so they bought the milling machine and rented space in the same building they occupy today.

"The Key Square bottle-opener was the thing that really launched the company," Adam says. "That was one of the originals. I designed it. I had a little mill in my garage."

When it was all done and said, the pair manufactured over 5,000 of these unique bottle-openers, selling them online for \$36 a pop, each one masterfully crafted of gleaming, hand-finished stainless steel.

When sales of this product began to taper off, the partners went back to the drawing board and came up with something entirely different. "Our bank account got kind of low and we were like, 'Oh man, we've got to come up with something else,'" says Ryan.

"That's when we came up with the aluminum wallet."

These are slim wallets, not much larger than a credit card, and about a half-inch thick. "There were other slim wallets out there, but having one made of metal was a totally new idea," says Adam.

"That kept us in business," Ryan says. "We sold more than ten thousand of them. We did a Kickstarter for them and raised about \$220,000." The wallets, which retailed for \$28, were available in aluminum as well as a Space Age metal.

Ryan holds up one of the wallets made of titanium. He holds either side with thumb and index finger, and bends it into a horse shoe, but when he releases the pressure, the wallet flexes back into its original form. "It's surprisingly strong," he says.

In the intervening years, Machine Era would produce several other products including tumblers and shot glasses crafted on a lathe out of solid anodized aluminum stock. A pair would retail for just over a hundred dollars. "We should have sold them for double that," says Ryan.

After they ceased producing the metal cups, Ryan and Adam moved into what has since become their signature items. "After the tumblers and shot glasses we started making pens," Ryan says. "It's just three pieces and an ink cartridge."

The pair worked together on the de-

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Some of the many products designed and produced by Machine Era.

sign of these pens, which are machined from brass, aluminum or stainless steel. They're about four and a half inches long, and have the perfect thickness and weight of a writing tool.

"We used CAD 3-D modeling to design it," says Adam. "Everything's real tight."


About three years ago, around the time they began manufacturing the pens, Adam and Ryan invested in a major piece of new equipment. It's the fully automated machine that takes up the majority of their shop. Called the SWISS GT 26, this machine is made by Tornos, a company based in Switzerland that invented lathes for the manufacture of Swiss watch parts. Precision is its hallmark.

Ryan passes me a twelve-foot bar of solid brass. "That is exactly a half-inch within plus or minus a half a thou," he tells me of the diameter of the rod. "You can't just run regular stock through the machine because it would get stuck. Out of two bars we make forty pens."

And these pens are selling extremely well online, and in a few brick-and-mortar shops including Le Rocketship at 13 Rue Henry Monnier in Paris, France, and locally at Na Nin on South Addison Street in the Fan.

With the SWISS GT 26, which does both milling and lathing, they have increased their daily output threefold during full production times. They seem to have found a real niche market, and they continue to add pen styles to their stock.

"Designed and machined in the USA," Ryan tells me, quoting the tagline that has been used to market Machine Era since its inception.

"We were one of the first companies to capitalize on that," says Adam. "We like it because we can control our product and the process and what it looks like. That will never change." 

To learn more about their products visit machine-era.com

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NORTH OF THE JAMES

Dawn Chorus

by MARY ELFNER

LOVE BIRDS. I ALWAYS HAVE.

My mother used to tell a story on me of waking up as a baby while the family was camping and smiling and laughing during the dawn chorus, that fleeting moment at dawn in the spring when all the birds seem to be singing at once. I was relating to the bird song – finding joy in it - I still do. So while there are many aspects and behaviors of birds that captivate us, like flying, building nests, laying eggs, and migration, it's bird song that fascinates me the most.

As a birder, this question is posed to me often: Why do birds sing? My easy answer is because they can. And then I ask, Why do you talk? There are more standard answers like for stating territory and attracting mates. And then there are the language and musical aspects.

I believe that bird song is a language and music rolled up in to one. The concept of melody could easily have been created from listening to bird song. And we are hard-wired to listen, and to imitate. When visiting schools to teach students about bird song identification and conservation, I play bird songs, and then ask the students to come up with a mnemonic device. For instance, the standard mnemonic saying for a three-parted Carolina wren is "Tea Kettle, Tea Kettle, Tea Kettle". But I've had students come up with "Cheese Burger, Cheese Burger, Cheese Burger". It's fun, and the kids get a real kick out of it. On a deeper level, they're being taught to listen and to appreciate the natural world around them, especially in their own backyard.

Scientific researchers at McGill University in Montreal have found compelling evidence that human speech and music, and bird song, may share a similar origin in the respective brains of humans and songbirds, with neurons firing in particular patterns. So, we as humans are, perhaps, predisposed to listen, and somewhere deep in our brains, understand the basic phrasing of bird song.

Unfortunately, I fear we are losing our interest in natural sounds. Or perhaps it's due more to being distracted by technology, then losing interest. George Monbiot states in his Opinion article in *The Guardian* (www.theguardian.com) "If children lose contact with nature they won't fight for it." Screens have become the preferred




mode of playing for most children, and they need to balance screen time with unstructured outdoor time.

The next aspect of birds that I and many others find fascinating is migration. Above us, twice a year, is a river of birds that the majority of us are not aware of. These migrating birds accomplish physical feats that you nor I could never dream of completing. For example, the Arctic tern flies from its breeding grounds in the Arctic to the Antarctic and back again each year of its life. One journey is greater than 12,000 miles. Imagine completing that kind of a marathon every year of your life.

But not all birds migrate. We have our resident birds like northern cardinals (they sound like car alarms), blue jays and Carolina wrens. They live here in our area year-round. Some birds visit us only for the winter - the yellow-bellied sapsucker (a woodpecker of the northern woods and for which the woods around Cornell University are named), the yellow-rumped warbler - affectionately known as a 'butter butt', and ducks of all kinds. And then some breed here and leave in the late summer/early fall for their wintering grounds - purple martins, wood thrush and many types of warblers. There is a great diversity in bird migration behavior and it's another fascinating aspect of birds and of learning about them. Many bird species travel widely and tie our planet together by migrating.

Among all these amazing behaviors and aspects of birds, what's most important is for us to get outside and enjoy them. You don't have to always

go outside though. Do you hear those mockingbirds and American robins singing their hearts out in the pre-dawn and sometimes all through the night? These birds are experiencing huge surges of energy through hormonal changes that force them to sing so that they can attract mates and keep the species going. Survival is strong. So, appreciate birds for their colorful feathers, sounds and behavior. Adults - take a child outside with you and awaken a sense of wonder in them. You don't have to know a lot of facts, just bring a healthy sense of curiosity.

In "A Sense of Wonder", Rachel Carson, mother of the environmental movement, wrote, "If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years...the alienation from the sources of our strength." 

A few things to electrify this sense of wonder:

Take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count each mid-February. gbbc.bird-count.org

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Learn more about bird species from Cornell University's All About Birds website. allaboutbirds.org

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Susan Frerichs & Will Armstrong

AN ARTFUL MARRIAGE

THIS PAST FALL, WILL ARMSTRONG CONTACTED

Jesse Narens, a Portland-based artist whose work he and his fiancée, Susan Frerichs, are both crazy about. On Instagram he found one particular mixed-media painting, “The Last Loon Will Follow Only Echoes,” that he and his betrothed absolutely adore. It was still for sale, but Will was at a lean time of the year, waiting on a couple of commission checks. Just before Christmas, with money now in the bank, he contacted the artist again, but the loon piece had already been sold. He cursed under his breath, but then Will bought another piece entitled “Tangled in Spiderwebs/Trying to Touch a Ghost” by the same artist. On Christmas morning, after the couple had opened their gifts, Will found out who had bought the piece he had originally wanted to buy for Susan. “Susan’s the one who bought it,” says Will. “It was for me. It’s our ‘Gift of the Magi’ story.

Susan Frerich and her husband-to-be live in an Arts and Crafts cottage on a tree-lined street in the Northside. The walls in every room are covered with artwork like a gallery. We sit in their living room and are joined by their small black and white dog named Gidget. She forms a curl in Susan’s lap.

“I’m from west central Minnesota, a pretty small town with something like twelve thousand people,” Susan says. She studied art at Carlton College, a liberal arts school in southern Minnesota. “I did more 2-D work then,” she says. “Drawing and printmaking.”

Toward the end of her time at Carlton, Susan took a class in metalsmithing to fulfill a 3-D requirement. “And metalsmithing’s what I really fell in love with,” she says.

She moved up to Minneapolis, and worked sales in fine jewelry and designer watches at Dayton’s, Marshall Fields and then Macy’s. Susan then took a job in customer service with a well-known jewelry designer named George Sawyer, who is known worldwide for an ancient Japanese metal working technique known as mokume gane. It’s a labor-intensive forging method that uses multi-colored gold, so the finished product looks layered, almost like Damascus steel.

“So I was working in his office, answering phones, going to trade shows with him, and he knew that I wanted to do some more hands on work,” Susan says. “Remember, I’d only taken one basic metalsmithing class so I didn’t have the skills to work at the bench. But he tried to get me involved in some projects, and so I started to get kind of a feel for it.”

Realizing Susan’s potential, George Sawyer recommend she enter the Revere Academy (now-defunct) in San Francisco. “So I did an intensive metalworking program there for three months,” she says. “It’s a hybrid trade school and art school. I learned really practical skills like how you resize a ring, and how you set gemstones, and then they slam you through a bunch of different techniques.”

While still on the West Coast, Susan heard about a jeweler in Minneapolis who was looking for an assistant jeweler. “So I was hired as a goldsmith right out of school,” she says.

This is where she learned to shape gold, to mold it, to encourage it with fire, to love it, and to revere it for the odd reality is.



“It’s complicated,” Susan tells me, smiling. “But it’s very empowering to work with a material that feels as solid as metal, but to be able to manipulate it and control it and change it.”

She has worked other precious metals over the years—silver, platinum, palladium. “But there’s nothing like gold,” says Susan. “There’s some kind of spiritual property to it. It’s hard to articulate.”

Susan looks up to the ceiling as if she might find the right words there. “There’s something almost unearthly about it,” she says. “Think of its origins. Precious metals rained down on Earth from outer space, like they literally are unearthly.”

“I have heard her talk about gold’s softness, how buttery it is,” Will says.

Susan’s grinning now. “I have put it in my mouth,” she says.

“She’ll get a new shipment of it, and just go MMMMMM,” says Will. “It’s kind of how I feel about blank paper.”

There’s also that rare metal’s tie to our cumulative cultures and histories. “The metal that I’m buying now comes from a refinery that uses recycled gold, so all the gold that I’m putting in with my pieces is connected with all that history,” says Susan. “You might have pieces of ancient Egypt mixed up with your neighbor’s gold teeth.”

Susan is wearing little jewelry, a pair of tiny skulls pierce the lobes of her ears, a distinctive diamond engagement ring circles a finger, and she often wears a pendant of a unicorn’s skull from a chain around her neck.

“What I love about jewelry is the personal connection, the pieces that become part of your story, or reflect something about your experience in the world,” she

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D’ANGELO

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Right: Will at work on one of his illustrative pieces.

Below: Some of Susan's metalwork.

says. "So I try to make a piece that is going to be somebody's very special piece."

Her jewelry is unlike any other jewelry I've ever seen. There's a bracelet that looks like a gated paddock, one pendant in the shape of a buffalo skull, another that describes the skeleton of a bat, and a stacked tower of skull rings.

"I do a lot of memento mori pieces so people sometimes commission me to make a piece in memory of a lost loved one," she says. "So they can wear it every day to keep that person close to them. So instead of making jewelry that people take on and off, or put in a drawer and forget, I want to make something special."

Susan tells me about a piece she made two years ago for a woman whose daughter had died. "I designed a ring that included some things that were special to her daughter, some things that reminded her of her daughter," says Susan. "It had a lot of symbolism, and it was a difficult piece to make because I'm pretty empathetic. But it was really meaningful, and that woman and I have become friends."

Will was born in Richmond, attended St. Christopher's, and, after a brief stint at UNC, Greensboro, went to VCU. "I didn't really get into art until college," he says. "I found my solace in the theater when I was in high school, that's where I found the weird kids, or my kind of crew."

While still in the Art Foundation program at VCU, Will wanted to be an animator, and he would ultimately earn his bachelor of fine arts degree in communication arts and design with a concentration in illustration.

"I heard early on that it's a lot easier to get hired as a graphic designer if you have skills as a graphic designer and you can illustrate," Will says. "That way the agency has an in-house illustrator. Basically, you learn the skills so they can take advantage of you."

He waited tables, bartended, and after college took a job with Suitable for Framing, where he worked for several years. Shortly after graduation from VCU, Will decided to show his portfolio to his best friend's older brother, a Richmonder who had made it big in New York as an art director for a slick, and well-respected, magazine.

As Will opened the portfolio, the man who faced him asked one question.

"Do you want me to be honest?"



"Okay," said Will.

And the man tore into him and his work. "He was ruthless," Will tells me. "He just ripped it up. I was all of twenty-one. He was probably thirty-two. He could have picked out certain things that he liked, but he didn't."

Will was devastated and continued working at the frame shop, but soon realized he could fall into a permanent slump. He took classes in Photoshop, Quark, Illustrator, things that had not been taught at VCU when Will attended art school there. He ended up get-

ting a job as assistant art director with Inside Business, a position he held until that publication folded.

After that he spent a fair amount of time at home, and decided to join his former wife at an art show. "She was an art show artist," Will says. "I laid out a piece of my work at her booth, and it sold that weekend. I laid out another piece, and it sold, too."

He began working with his former wife who was doing metal work at the time. "It took off to the point where we were very successful," he says. "We

were doing the art show circuit, doing a line of metal work and mirrors. At our height we had three assistants; one full-time, two part-time."

During those years when that business thrived, Will put his illustration work aside. "I put it on ice," he says. "I was just doing those metal mirrors and wall hangings."

In time, people lost interest in that work, and his marriage was going rapidly south. "Everything kind of fell apart," Will says. After the business tanked, he immersed himself in illus-

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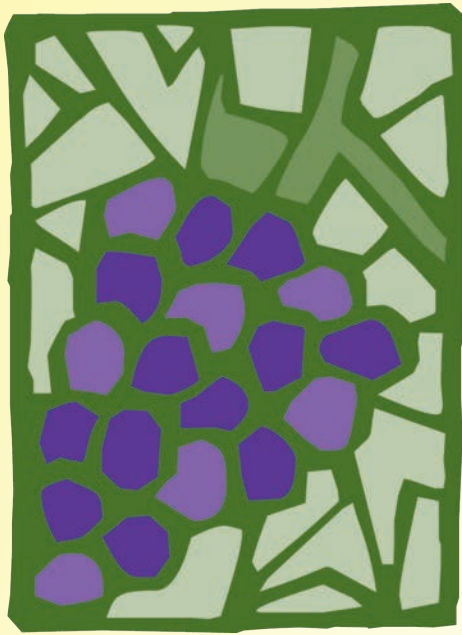
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tration again, and began showing his work at art shows, and selling them. "It took off like I was never dead," he says.

Initially, his work was literal representationalism. "When I first started out, I was just learning my technique, and doing rock 'n roll portraits and blues portraits and things like that," he says. He then began producing cityscapes, and all his work was selling well along the art show circuit.

And then his work took on a highly narrative style. "I've got my technique down to the point where I can say whatever I want to," says Will. "And I'm telling music stories about songs and different artists telling them. I'll take a fragment of a song, and retell the story."

He mentions the one he did on Stagger Lee. "So the story is two guys were gambling in an alley, one guy wins the other guy's money. They keep complaining about it and arguing about it and back in the bar somebody touches somebody's hat and Stagger Lee shoots Billy Lyons. So that's the true story."

Will's eyes widen. "But then there're different versions," he says. "From Nick Cave saying Billy wanted to have sex with Stagger Lee. To Furry Lewis saying Billy Lyons was a whiny little bitch and deserved to be shot."

But Will's own tale takes a different tack. "In my version," he says. "Stagger Lee is deaf, and it's this big illustration of that song, which is not in any of the lyrical versions of it. So I like to do that."

Consider his interpretation of Robert Johnson's "Crossroad Blues".

"I'll change the Devil to a train and have 666 on the train," Will says. "I might put Keith Richard's ring on the blues player's finger just to say where the music comes from, and where it goes."

These days, Susan and Will exhibit and sell at about fifteen juried art shows each year. "We just got back from two and a half weeks on the road," Will says. "I'm in the middle of a four-show in five-week run, which is pretty grueling, but then I'll have two weeks off, then another show, three weeks off, then another." By Christmas the shows will come to an end for about three months, which is when the pair revs up for production mode.

"A lot of times, at these shows, we take commissions," Susan says. "In a few minutes, I have to go back to the studio and make an engagement ring that's due next week."

"We're lucky to be in the top shows in the country," says Will. "And we're lucky to be getting married in July."

Susan Frerichs and Will Armstrong are entwined now, sitting on the couch, joined at the shoulders, if not the hips.

Unspeakable Treatment Of Immigrants By ICE

by **FRAN WITHROW**

THERE ARE SOME life experiences that cut so close to the soul and marrow of who we are they can only be expressed through poetry. This was my gut reaction to the elegant, poignant book, "When I Walk Through That Door, I Am: An Immigrant Mother's Quest."

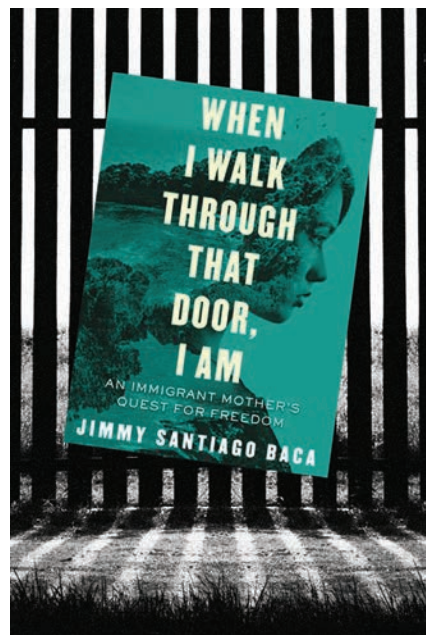
Poetry is a difficult writing form: each word must be deliberately chosen, each line and spacing carefully crafted. It is a tremendous challenge to tell a story using this difficult medium, yet author Jimmy Santiago Baca pulls it off masterfully.

You can read this little book in a half an hour, but please don't. Poetry is not meant to be rushed. While the story is powerful, equally compelling is the language used. It is meant to be read slowly and savored completely.

And now for the backstory. Many years ago, Baca, who lives in New Mexico, offered a job to a Burmese refugee, Sae-Po. As they worked together to build a cabin on his farm, Baca came to see what a courageous, compassionate man Sae-Po was. Then one day when Baca came to Sae-Po's apartment to pick him up for the work day, Sae-Po and his family were gone, led away in handcuffs in the night.

Baca's sorrow and anger over the unjust treatment of immigrants like Sae-Po led him to pen the first eloquent lines of this book. In this story, Sophia, a San Salvadorian mother, wakes to gunshots in the middle of the night. Gangs have murdered her husband, who was on his way home from work, for refusing to give them half his wages. She rushes out and holds him as he dies, and then, fearing further gang violence, decides to seek refuge in America with her four-year old son, Joaquin.

At the border, ICE separates her from Joaquin and imprisons her for a year, during which she is assaulted by the guards. When she is finally released, she has no idea where her child is. She ends up in Virginia, but she vows she will never stop looking for her beloved son. "I keep walking/carrying you



in my thoughts/I feel I am walking up a mountain."

It is every parent's nightmare: being separated from their children; not knowing where their babies are. I cannot imagine the heartache and desperation that must consume frantic parents who run to the U.S. border only to have what is most precious to them taken away. Isn't that just who they were trying to save by running?

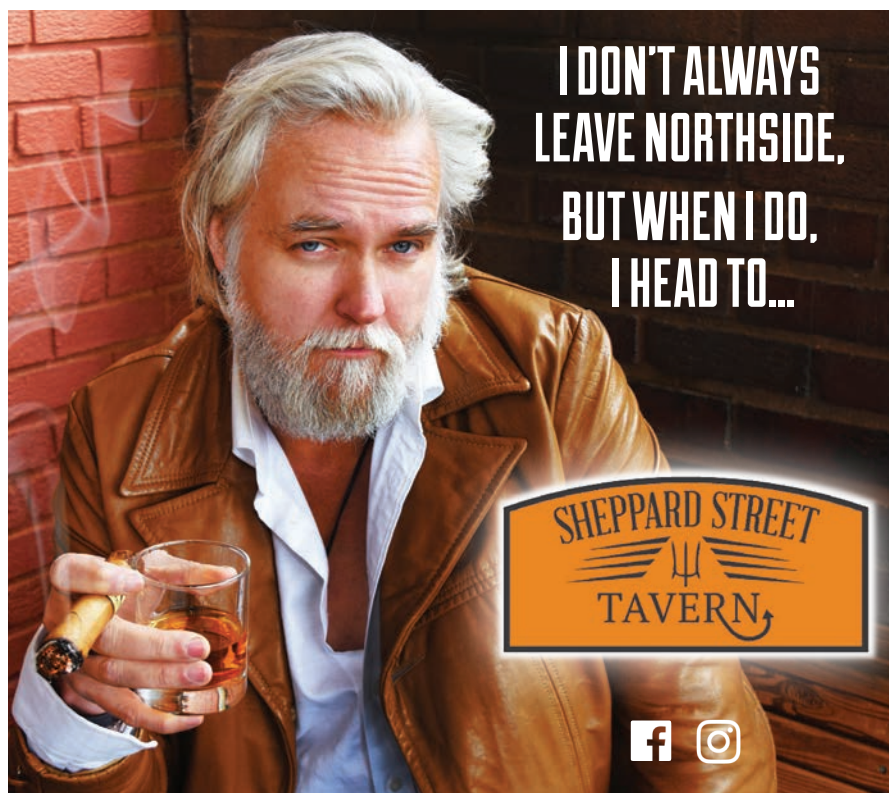
Sophia mourns her late husband, she mourns her missing son, but she vows to keep going. "The stones and dirt witness/The stones ask/ The stones take/ The stones tell/ 'Lay it on us,/ We will absorb your sadness.'"

Baca has written a moving book addressing a humanitarian crisis. His achingly honest portrayal of an immigrant mother's plight will surely capture your attention.

May we all listen and take heed. **N9**

When I Walk Through That Door, I Am:
An Immigrant Mother's Quest
By Jimmy Santiago Baca
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WHAT'S NEW

Stir Crazy Ramps It Up A Couple Notches

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

VICKIE AND TRE HALL, the owners of Stir Crazy, have completely revamped the kitchen and the menu, creating even more from-scratch dishes that have made this popular coffee shop and eatery the go-to place in Northside.

"We have our regulars, but we're pulling a lot of people from outside the neighborhood," Vickie tells me.

We're seated around table in the conference room late on a weekday afternoon.

"I wanted us to be more of a sandwich and coffee shop," says Tre. "A nice additive to what we had already going. In the morning with the bagels and the biscuits and everything simple and fast, and with lunch more sandwich offerings. Most of the sandwiches we have now were not on the menu before."

He mentions the little mushroom sandwich made with roasted mushrooms, tomatoes and sweet pepper relish on wheat berry bread. They've also added flatbreads, including an eggplant caponata with roasted sweet peppers topped with arugula, balsamic onions and balsamic vinaigrette. "We also have a barbecue chicken flatbread, and one with a roasted mushroom medley," he says. "We've brought in more vegan and vegetarian options."

The menu itself is easier to follow. "It was hard to read and understand," Tre says. "I wanted to clarify it and give people an idea of what we have. You can get basic deli sandwiches, and specialty sandwiches that I wanted to create."

One of the new additions is the Kinda Cuban, which is made with ham and pulled chicken topped with Swiss cheese and pickles. "We also have our club sandwich, which is huge," Tre says. "It's about three and half ounces of turkey, three and a half ounces of ham, stacked up tall with bacon."

For sides, customers can choose from kettle chips, bean and corn salad, coleslaw, and a seasonal side. As the days lengthen and grow ever warmer, they plan to add cold soups to the menu, things like vichyssoise and gazpacho.

They have also begun doing a sandwich and side special on Thursdays. "Last

week we did a beef tenderloin sandwich with sun-dried tomato and horseradish sauce with provolone on ciabatta," says Vickie. "They sold out pretty quickly."

"I want to do a pastrami sandwich this week," Tre adds.

And much of what comes out of the kitchen these days is made onsite. "A lot of things are made from scratch," Vickie says. "We roast our own peppers. We make the balsamic onions."

They also have a baker who comes to work every morning at four. "She bakes scones with a lot of different flavors," says Vickie. "There's a ginger fig, a vanilla apricot. She also makes flourless chocolate cake, a couple different crumb cakes, and salted caramel brownies."

"And we may soon move into making our own cakes," Tre says.

"People have embraced it all," says Vickie. "People come in and they try something new every day, and they like it. We do still have people that want some of the old favorites, and even though they're not on the menu people can still get them."

There may be more changes on the horizon. They may extend weekday hours during the summer, and begin offering tapas during special events like the monthly Open Mike Nights and Third Thursday Music Nights. "Little appetizers that can be shared," Vickie says.

Her husband nods. "Things like bacon-wrapped dates stuffed with parmesan cheese and baby spring rolls," he says. "Something you can nosh on."

They consider the kitchen changes and the menu enhancements.

"We wanted a way for us to stand out from some of the other coffee shops in the area," Vickie says. "And we already do stand out because it's like a living room, as if you're coming home when you come in here. With the new menu we've made Stir Crazy stand out even more. Food has set us apart."

"And there's more to come," says Tre. **NJ**

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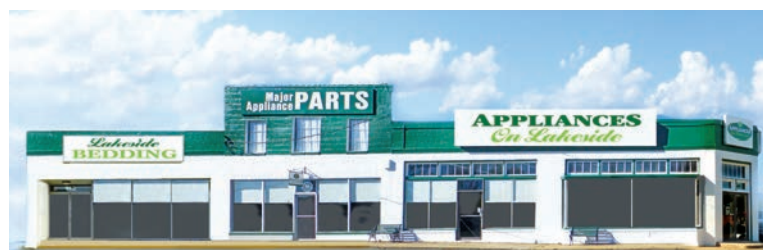


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