

INDY **week**

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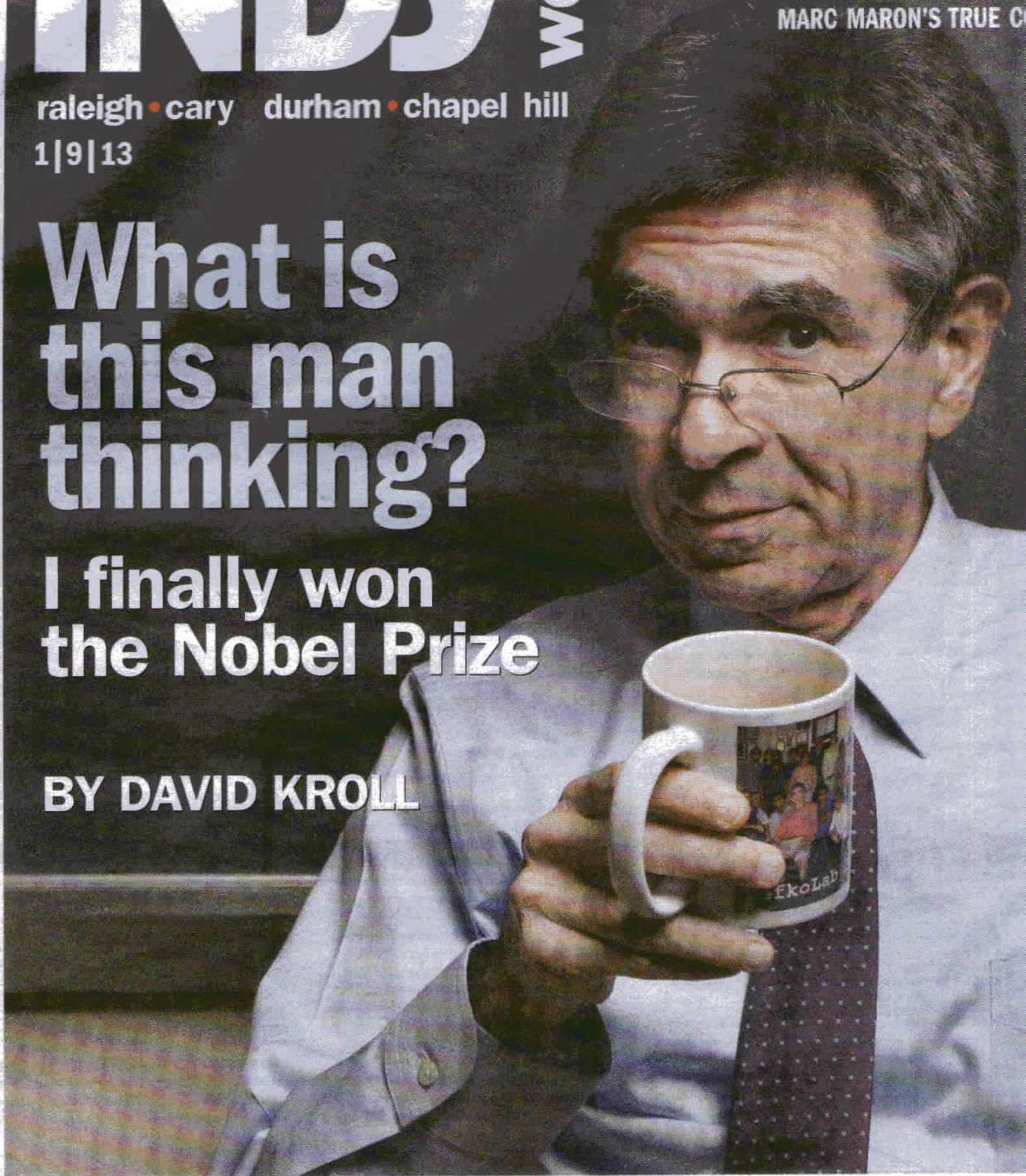
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What is this man thinking?

I finally won the Nobel Prize

BY DAVID KROLL

WAKE SCHOOL BOARD
CAN KICKSTART
MARC MARON'S TRUE C



● EAT & DRINK

Holy cow

Neighbors chip in to restore a beloved bovine

BY EMILY WALLACE

We meet in a gravel parking lot and flip through papers spread among the otherwise near-empty trunk of Charles Poe's blue Honda Accord. Poe's salt-and-pepper hair peaks from beneath his brown cap, and though the sky is overcast, he never removes his sunglasses.

When we arranged our appointment days earlier by phone, Poe feigned surprise that I wanted to talk. "To me, it's just not that important because it's been around so long," he said of the cow sculpture in question.

But the contents of his trunk say otherwise: A small drawing of the cow on an orange card that advertises a "special gift" for customers, along with photographs of the shop when he ran it from 1989 to 2000. And at his home on Kerr Lake, Poe has a scrapbook filled with photographs and newspaper clippings about the cow.

It's an impressive archive for a man who says he doesn't value the fiberglass beast.

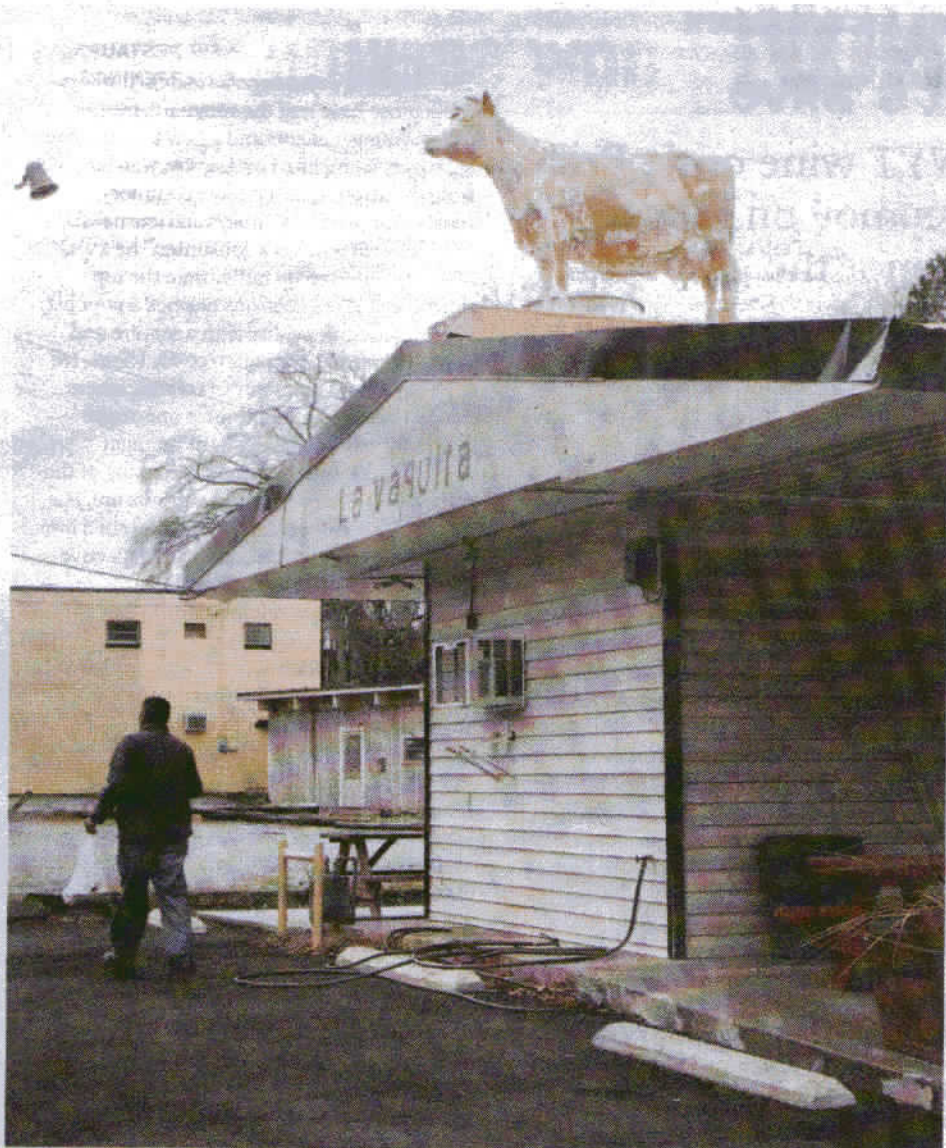
Poe's father, Albert M. Poe, opened Poe's Farm Fresh Dairy convenient mart in Durham's Tuscaloosa-Lakewood neighborhood on Friday, Nov. 13, 1964. The store was one of several joint ventures with Pine State Dairy, which initially sold milk products, and then alcohol and tobacco. Poe's mart was known as one of the "Cow Stores" because of the brown-and-white fiberglass Jersey cow perched on the roof.

In fact, the weathered cow still stands guard over the neighborhood atop the building, now home to Taqueria La Vaquita. It is not just a neighborhood icon, but also a beacon for Durham that extends beyond the city limits.

"Somebody offered me \$10,000 for that cow one time," Poe recalls. "A guy from Virginia—he said to call him 24/7."

When the cow was threatened by a 1988 city ordinance that banned rooftop signs in Durham, several folks spoke in the cow's defense. Former Durham County Commissioner Becky Heron told *The News & Observer*: "Let the cow alone. As long as they keep the building up and in good condition it's a landmark."

Columnist Jim Wise describes the squabble in 27 *Views of Durham*, saying, "With Save the Cow a ringing refrain, the city council duly took the cow under consideration." In the end,



the cow was proclaimed a historic landmark and allowed to stay (and another sign on Poe's property, which loomed a whopping 3 feet too high, was asked to be shortened or removed).

Its paint peeling, the cow has seen better days. Mary Wible, who lives in the Tuscaloosa-Lakewood neighborhood, approached Poe about her raising funds to ensure that it continues to reign above Chapel Hill Road. She urged folks on her local listserv (including me, I live in the neighborhood) to chip in to rehab the peeling cow.

A real estate agent who serves on the board of several nonprofits, Wible says the initiative was "the easiest fundraising" she's ever done. Neighbors, particularly members of Duke's Alpha Delta Phi fraternity, which owns houses on Chapel Hill Road, pitched in toward the \$1,200 goal.

Locating an artist to restore the sculpture was simple. The CowParade North Carolina 2012, a public art project that benefited the North Carolina Children's Hospital, placed 79 painted or dressed-up fiberglass cows throughout the state.

Wible found Raleigh-based Matthew Mahler by posting on CowParade's Facebook page. "I had just learned how to paint a cow

Turn right at the cow: The beloved bovine atop Taqueria La Vaquita, which translates to "small cow." PHOTO BY D.L. ANDERSON

for outdoor, public display," Mahler says of his new skill. For several days last month, the cow beamed with a glossy new layer of caramel-colored paint. But cool weather kept spots from drying, causing Mahler to restrip the surface until warmer days allow for further painting.

Poe looks up at the cow from the back of La Vaquita's parking lot and questions if, with blotches and patches, the sculpture is complete. I assures him that, on several levels, the cow seems far from finished.

"I just couldn't believe, the way that people are struggling to make ends meet today for their own lives, that people would do that," he says of the fundraising. "I'm glad they did."

Indeed, it seems rare for a group of neighbors to renovate an aspect of a business' building. But as Wible says of the cow, "She's pretty iconic, especially to Bull City." And as resident Susan Sewell explains, "It makes giving directions easy." ▲