

## Support Needed for ‘At-Risk’ HCPS Students, says Virginia Department of Education

Liah Chung  
Staff Writer

On Feb. 23, 2024, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) announced that 12 schools in the Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) system have been identified as in need of more support for at-risk students. According to the Henrico Citizen, the schools were assessed based on a federally-approved accountability system.

The newly listed schools in the report this year are Brookland Middle School, Cashell Donahoe Elementary School, Harold Macon Ratcliffe Elementary School, Jacob L. Adams Elementary School, and L. Douglas Wilder Middle School. Seven Henrico schools remained on the list from last year, including Elko Middle School, Fair Oaks Elementary School, Fairfield Middle School, Glen Lea Elementary School, Highland Springs Elementary School, John Rolfe Middle School, and Laburnum Elementary School.

In 2015, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which aims to uphold “challenging” academic standards while providing protection for disadvantaged students at their schools. According to this legislation, states must identify schools that report low performance on standardized tests, high chronic absenteeism, and lack of progress for English learners. Specifically, the Virginia Code classifies students as at-risk if they have “a physical, emotional, intellectual, socioeconomic, or cultural risk factor” that “may negatively influence [their] educational success.”

These factors all indicate that students at those schools are in need of greater support. According to the Henrico Citizen, during the 2022-2023 school year at Highland Springs Elementary School (HSES), 35 percent of students passed their reading Standards



Students walking through the school hall.

of Learning (SOL) assessments while only 27 percent passed their math SOLs. Due to these lower performance rates, HSES placed in the bottom 5 percent of Virginia’s Title 1 schools and is listed as needing “comprehensive” support.

Many factors that affect student performance are rooted in economic or familial instability. “Sometimes it’s just not a priority for families,” said Marcie Shea, the Henrico School Board Representative for the Tuckahoe district. “Instabilities within the house [such as] food insecurities or needing to take care of younger siblings can impede [students’] ability to make it to school.”

One system established by Henrico County to strengthen support for families and encourage attendance is the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Department. It boomed during COVID and now is “really an integral part all over our county,” said Mrs. Shea. “The FACE department [connects families] with food programs, with clothing, [and] with other social services and support.”

At Brookland Middle School, “lots of students are dealing with things in the community that are not focused on their learning ... things that also have a big impact on whether or not they do well on these standardized tests,” said Dr. Nicholas Barlett, the principal at Brookland. Other factors include financial and language barriers. Brookland Middle School has the largest ESL population of middle schools in the county. “About 85 percent of [its] population is considered to be falling into economic deprivation,” he said.

Dr. Barlett cited the pandemic as a major factor that affected at-risk students. At Brookland, 10 percent of students were chronically absent before the pandemic. Since returning to school, the amount of chronic absenteeism has risen to 25 percent of all Brookland students. To address this issue, Brookland is attempting to better engage students and their families. “[We go] door to door to say we really want to have [them] join us so they can get to see the school and feel comfortable,” said Dr. Barlett.

Another attempt to provide needed resources for students is the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). “CEP provides free breakfast and free lunch for all students in the school, whether they qualify for free and reduced lunch or not,” said Mrs. Shea. This also helps to destigmatize free lunch for students. “It’s hard to learn with a hungry belly,” she said. “So we’re making sure everybody’s fed.”

According to Mrs. Shea, literacy has been a major focus in attempts to elevate students’ education. After Superintendent Dr. Cashwell introduced a “really laser intense focus, particularly on literacy ... all of [Henrico] schools now have literacy coaches,” said Mrs. Shea. Henrico has also “revamped [the] literacy curriculum to focus on the science of reading and added extra literacy support particularly at the middle school level,” she said. Similar efforts have been made with numeracy, or math, coaches.

At the school-level, Brookland has made accommodations for ESL students by putting ESL teachers in math, science, and

social studies classes, according to Dr. Barlett. “As [ESL students] learn English, they can also get the content knowledge that they need,” he said. In addition to these reforms, the school is starting an after-school program with provided transportation for tutoring and homework help.

Brookland’s after-school program is one of many throughout the county. Other schools’ after-school programs include snacks, dinner for students’ families, and enrichment opportunities like athletics. The programs ensure that students can participate in “all of these

“We’ve got to make education an exciting ... option for people to go into as a career.”

- Dr. Barlett

other things that [they] might not have access to,” said Mrs. Shea.

Out of everything, Dr. Barlett believes that teachers are the key to student success. “When the students engage with us and work with the teachers, their scores get better,” he said. “We’ve got to make education an exciting and viable option for people to go into as a career ... the more support we get for teachers, the more support we get from home.”

Programs and reforms such as these have already created some visible progress compared to the start of the school year, according to Dr. Barlett. The federal identification “is another way that we know that we’ve got to continue to improve,” he said. “It may not be overnight ... but we’re going to make the changes and continue to push to see our kids make the numbers that they can, and eventually we’ll hit the numbers. We’ll get there.”

## Dr. Marshall Honored with the REB Award for Distinguished Leadership

Sadie Edlavitch  
Staff Writer

On March 11, 2024, Dr. John Marshall, principal of Douglas S. Freeman High School, was awarded the 2023-2024 REB Award for Distinguished Educational Leadership. The Community Foundation and the REB Foundation present the award annually to four principals, one from each of the following localities: Henrico, Chesterfield, Hanover, and Richmond. A surprise ceremony for Dr. Marshall was held in the Freeman library with his family members, students, and colleagues present alongside Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) representatives.

Dr. Marshall has been Freeman’s principal since 2019, qualifying him for the award, which requires principals to have served at their school for at least three years. Dr. Marshall joined HCPS in 2005 as a history teacher and wrestling coach at Varina High School. He became the social studies department chair at Glen Allen High School and the school’s assistant principal. He was recognized as HCPS’ Instructional Leader of the Year in 2022 and received the Kay Vasse Memorial Award for Outstanding Service to English Learners in 2019. For the REB award, Dr. Marshall received a \$10,000 personal cash grant and an additional \$20,000 for school projects. Four runner-up

principals were also recognized and received \$10,000 awards to support their proposed projects.

With the money, Dr. Marshall plans to create an incentive-based soccer club program called FC Freeman. “A during[the]-school-day soccer program for our multilingual learners will help them really feel part of the school, to be celebrated, and to tie that to positive behavioral awards,” said Dr. Marshall. At the end of the award ceremony, he thanked his peers and everyone else involved. “Any success I have is because of the people around me,” said Dr. Marshall. “I know it sounds cliché, but it happens to be true, and I just get to take credit for it.”

This award specifically recognizes principals who go beyond

the day-to-day demands of their jobs to create an exceptional learning environment. Ms. Pantele, an assistant principal at Freeman, reflected on Marshall’s impact. “If you think about Dr. Marshall’s mission and vision for the school by creating a Freeman family for all, he is really trying to prioritize making sure that all of our students see themselves here and can get involved with something they care about,” said Ms. Pantele. “He was nominated by teachers, students, and parents. He won this award against principals from Hanover, Chesterfield, and ... Richmond so it is a huge deal.” She also shared more about Dr. Marshall’s hopes for the prospective “FC Freeman” project. “It will connect students and



Dr. Marshall receiving his award

families from all different backgrounds and nationalities with a common love of soccer,” she said.

Overall, this award displays the significance of effective management and communication skills, alongside the ability to inspire, encourage, and advocate for the school community. “I have a lot of gratitude to be recognized, and it means a lot that people notice that we’re doing good work here,” said Dr. Marshall.

In addition to Dr. Marshall’s achievement, Jennifer Rhoden, a Mills E. Godwin High School graduate, became the principal of David Kaechele Elementary School in 2021. She also served as a student teacher at Charles

Johnson Elementary School and later taught at Highland Springs and Skipwith Elementary Schools. Rhoden was runner-up for the REB award in Henrico and will receive a \$10,000 grant to create a maker space for students to relax, recharge, create, and socialize. “I was really caught off guard ... I had no idea. Completely shocked,” said Rhoden. “When I came here, everyone said it was a family and they would never leave to go anywhere else. And I do find that to be true.” Rhoden also holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University, along with a post-master’s graduate certificate from the University of Richmond.



Dr. Marshall and his family during the reception





# SB 44 Signed Into Law

Maggie Jacoby  
Features Editor

Virginia State Senator Schuyler VanValkenburg and Virginia House Delegate Rodney Willett have introduced a new piece of gun control legislation to the Virginia General Assembly, called SB 44, which enhances Virginia’s existing Child Access Prevention (CAP) law. The bill aims to incentivize the safe storage of firearms by holding adult gun owners accountable when a minor uses their firearm to inflict violence or physical harm to themselves or others. Virginia’s current CAP law rules that it is illegal to “recklessly leave a loaded, unsecured firearm in such a manner as to endanger the life or limb of any child under the age of fourteen.” If a person is found guilty of violating this law, they receive a Class 1 misdemeanor or charge. However, this law does not protect children from ages 14 to 17. It also does not address how to properly store unattended firearms, nor how firearm owners should lock up their lethal weapons in an appropriate manner. After the death of Lucia Bremer,

issues with the previous legislation became more apparent. Lucia was a 13-year-old student who attended Quiocassin Middle School in Henrico County, Virginia. On March 26, 2021, Lucia was on her way home from playing soccer at Godwin High School when she was shot and killed by then-14-year-old, Dylan Williams. Williams, who did not know Lucia, obtained the gun from a guardian he was living with at the time. The Virginia Commonwealth Attorney’s office informed Lucia’s parents, Jonathan and Meredith Bremer, about the limitations of CAP — specifically, how it was inapplicable to Lucia’s case. “It was from that point that we began to work with our delegate at the time, Schuyler VanValkenburg, to introduce new legislation that would strengthen the existing CAP law,” said Mr. Bremer. Advocating for Lucia’s Law was no small feat. The Bremers testified at the General Assembly in 2022 and 2023, but the bill did not make it out of committee. “After the Nov. 2023 election, I began working with now-Senator VanValkenburg and Delegate Rodney Willett to write and introduce a focused bill that would address

holding adults accountable for keeping their firearms out of the hands of their children who are exhibiting violent or dangerous behaviors,” said Jon Bremer. “We hoped to draft a bill that could receive bipartisan support.” During the 2024 legislative session, Jon repeatedly visited the General Assembly office buildings to meet with legislators and their staff. He told Lucia’s story and explained the logistics behind the bill being proposed. After Jon and Meredith testified in the Senate and House Committees, the legislation was passed in both chambers with support from the Republican and Democratic parties. Under Lucia’s Law, any adult person responsible for a minor can be convicted of a Class 5 felony if their willful act or omission enables that child to gain possession of a firearm and if they are aware of circumstances or prior criminal actions that would suggest a threat of violence or physical harm to that minor or others. “This legislation is a good first step,” said Mr. Bremer. “Stronger legislation may compel gun owners whose firearms are under-secured to re-evaluate how their weapons are stored and make appropriate changes.”



Lucia Bremer Memorial Field at Quiocassin

Natalie Murchie, a junior at Freeman, was one of Lucia’s best friends at Quiocassin. “I don’t think I have ever met a more light-filled, joy-radiating person in my life,” said Natalie. “I hope that [the bill] can spread awareness of Lucia’s story and show even more people all of the light and joy she brought into this world.” On March 26, 2024, three years after Lucia’s tragedy, Senator VanValkenburg and Delegate Willett joined the Bremer family in light of Governor Glenn Youngkin’s decision to sign their identical

companion bills. This solidified the charge of a class 5 felony for adults who leave unsecured firearms in their home after being notified that the child with potential access poses a threat of violence. “No family should have to experience the kind of loss that we have,” said Mr. Bremer. “We want gun owners to be held responsible for keeping their firearms secured and out of the hands of children.” Through Lucia’s Law, stricter gun regulations will be put into place and, in turn, help Virginia’s children be better protected.

## MAVS ON THE STREET: PROJECT MAVERICK RECAP



“Our purpose was to improve classroom engagement by implementing more hands-on and fun activities.”  
-Adeeba Hussain, 12

“Our goal is to create a stronger community at Freeman by creating opportunities for MLL students to meet native English speakers in laid back settings.”  
-Emily Ellen, 12



“We want the arts to be accessible to everyone, regardless of financial restraints.”  
-Liam Meadows, 12

GRAPHIC: AVA FLOURNOY  
INTERVIEW: CATE WOODRUM (STAFF WRITER)

# New Emergency Mental Health Clinic Opens in Henrico

Izzy Minkler  
Staff Writer

In March 2024, Richmond welcomed a new addition to its mental health infrastructure with the opening of the Mental Health Crisis Center for Youth. The facility within St. Joseph’s Villa in Henrico County is the first of such facilities to open in the greater Richmond area. The Crisis Receiving Center (CRC) will have trained professionals — including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses — on hand to assess, diagnose, and provide treatment for each patient. The primary goal of the CRC is to divert inpatient hospitalization and reduce the community’s reliance on mental healthcare support in hospital emergency departments. Emergency rooms typically have long waits, which pose an additional

challenge for individuals experiencing a traumatic situation. The clinic’s ultimate goal is for their patients to not have to return to the CRC, but rather figure out a long-term solution alongside caring for the patient in the moment. The facility will be open 24/7 to ensure that mental healthcare and supportive services are available whenever necessary. The initial capacity of the CRC is six youth patients, with the expectation that it will eventually expand to accommodate nine. Patients can stay for up to 15 consecutive days, free of charge. St. Joseph’s is collaborating with Henrico County to develop the center and offer a range of intervention services to those ages 7 to 17. The facility plans to work closely with local schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations to ensure a continuum of care within and outside the facility. The opening of this emergency

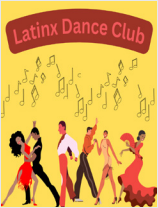
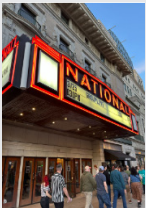
center represents a step forward in addressing the mental needs of teens in Richmond. Mental Health America ranks Virginia 39th among the states in accessibility of its behavioral health workforce and 48th in mental health access for children and youth. The CRC fills a gap in Virginia’s healthcare system and the state’s overall support for mental health. Additionally, the CRC intends to provide care methods that prioritize the total well-being of the patient beyond just their physical needs. “The Crisis Receiving Center provides an important alternative for youth and their families experiencing a mental health crisis,” said Daniel Rigsby, the division director of Clinical and Prevention Services for Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services. “It will be able to provide quick access to care in an environment that will feel more like a home than a hospi-



Ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new clinic

tal.” To prioritize a holistic approach to care, the CRC will offer not only medical interventions, but also therapy, counseling sessions, and educational resources for both patients and guardians. A recent report from the Virginia Department of Health found that between 2016 and 2021, the hospitalization rate for self-harm among youth increased by 50 percent. According to the CDC, suicide is now the second leading cause of death among adolescents

in the United States. “[The] Crisis Receiving Center ... marks a major milestone in expanding our community’s access to essential mental health care,” said Kathleen Burke Barrett, the Chief Executive Officer of St. Joseph’s Villa. “We are proud to... ensure youth can receive skilled support when they most urgently need it.” By providing timely access to mental health services, the facility aims to prevent crises from escalating and ultimately save lives.





# Sundays are for Soul Food

Lorelei Kelley  
Copy Editor

From freshly squeezed lemonade to made-to-order sliders, Richmond’s annual Mobile Soul Sunday event has something for everyone. Held on the Sunday before Richmond Black Restaurant Week, the event highlights Black-owned food trucks and Black artists in the Richmond area. This year, Monroe Park was flooded with thousands of attendees, myself included. Upon arriving at the event, I was surrounded by music and laughter. A variety of mouthwatering scents wafted from every station and I immediately realized the improbability of sampling dishes from even half of the food trucks there. With over 20 vendors lining the park, ranging from Caribbean to New American cuisine, I was left with a wide range of options. After perusing the menus for a few minutes, I settled on two different food vendors: Blessed Meals on Wheels and Rollin Eatz. My first stop was Blessed Meals on Wheels for the \$25 ‘Blessed Meal,’ which included a ‘Blessed Entrée’ and two ‘Blessed Sides.’ For my meal, I opted for green beans, house-made mac n’ cheese, and gravy-smothered pork chops. Other main dishes included turkey wings and fried catfish. Although the line was long, the wait time for my meal was no more than expected for fresh-made, quality food. As soon as I picked up my dish, I knew it was going to be delicious. After the first bite of my ‘Blessed Entrée,’ I was in heaven. The pork chops were juicy and tender, and the gravy ensured that the meat didn’t dry out in the slightest. As for the mac n’



Sliders from Rollin Eatz

cheese, the noodles were perfectly al dente, smothered in decadent, creamy cheese. The green beans were also delectable and cooking them in turkey fat added a savory flavor that I adored. Owner Dominique Tucker shared that this was her first time getting on the highly competitive list of vendors at Mobile Soul Sunday. “I always had a passion for cooking because my grandmother, my mom, and my sister could cook,” she said. After her husband fell ill, Dominique turned to catering as a way to support her family. This blossomed into the company she owns today and the incredible food I got to sample. Next up was Rollin Eatz, which specializes in fresh-cut fries and made-to-order beef and chicken sliders. Run by Chef Miles Henderson alongside his wife, Latoria Henderson, and son, Jamari “The Fry Guy” Henderson, this

is a must-try spot for any future Mobile Soul Sunday attendees. Although the menu was simple, the food was divine. I got the beef sliders with fries, while my mom tried the chicken sliders with fries and house-made pickles. We also couldn’t resist an order of the cinnamon sugar churro bites. As advertised, the food was hot, fresh, and delicious. The meat for both sliders was juicy with just the right amount of crispiness on the chicken and char on the burgers. Our fries were well-seasoned and had a perfectly crunchy exterior while retaining a pillowy softness inside. Last, but certainly not least, were the churro bites. As I opened the box, I was greeted by a mountain of golden churros topped with cinnamon sugar and caramel sauce. The sheer volume of food for its \$6 price was incredible. While I wasn’t the biggest fan of the cooked cinnamon apples



Mobile Soul Sunday poster

on the side, I tend to dislike those anyway, so it was more a reflection of my palate than the cooking abilities of the Rollin Eatz crew. Although Mobile Soul Sunday has passed, both of these food trucks will be at a variety of future events. To find Rollin Eatz, stop by the Juneteenth celebration at Dorey Park on June 15, 2024. “[Dorey Park] is honestly one of our favorite landmarks,” said Latoria. “It’s where we did our grand opening and where we do a lot of our business.” Rollin Eatz also participates

in the Dorey Park farmers market throughout the year. Other events and pop-ups can be found on their Instagram, @rollineatzva. If you’re looking for a more traditional take on southern classics, Blessed Meals on Wheels will also be participating in the Juneteenth event. Watch for them at events hosted by Henrico County Parks and Recreation over the course of 2024. Updates and extra information can be found on the company’s Instagram account, @blessedmealsonwheels05.

# Adrienne Lenker Envisions a “Bright Future”

Afton Hessian  
News Editor

Four years after the release of “songs,” singer-songwriter Adrienne Lenker finds herself in a new reality, unburdened by loss. The 12 songs on “Bright Future,” Lenker’s seventh solo project, were recorded without digital processes. The stylistic choice to revert to 100 percent analog-analog-analog (AAA), highlights the vulnerability that courses through each track. The record opens with “Real House,” acting as an anthology for the rest of the album and de-

tailoring Lenker’s philosophy on love and loss. Lenker yearns for blurry moments in childhood, and remembers, “Braiding willow branches into a crown/That love is all I want.” The song guides the listener through moments in her life, in a style reminiscent of the storytelling in Mount Eerie’s “A Crow Looked at Me” and Thom Yorke’s lyricism on “A Moon Shaped Pool.” Known for her turns of phrase, Lenker compares the comfort her mother brought her when she was in the hospital to the first time she saw her mother cry as her dog died. In the last few lines, Lenker laments, “We held her body as they put the needle in her/And then I saw you cry.” “Sadness As A Gift” sees Lenker

reckoning the death of a relationship through the seasons. With each fallen leaf or frozen firefly comes a new wave of acceptance. She recognizes that “There is nothing more to say/Chance has shut her shining eyes/And turned her face away,” and sweetly decides “I’ll love you ‘till I die/Oh, what more could I possibly say.” Such a conclusion envelops the listener in a warmth similar to her songs “Money” and “Indiana.” In the 10 years since those songs were released, Lenker now knows that love doesn’t expire through life. A highly-anticipated new recording of “Vampire Empire” also appeared on the record. In this rendition, Lenker’s stripped-back instrumentals, more resigned vocal performance, and addition of the lyric “In her vampire empire, I’m the fish and she’s my gills,” create a sound that reflects the wisdom she has gained since the song’s initial release. In “Evol,” Lenker poses and answers questions through the device of palindromes. If ‘love’ is ‘evol’ and ‘time’ is ‘emit,’ Lenker wonders if an alternate universe she can travel back to or a future life she has yet to be a part of exists. She details, “‘Dream’ is ‘maerd,’ I’m marred in your mind/Four words, forwards/Can’t we rewind,” and sings plainly, “You have my heart/I want it back.” These brazen statements set “Bright Future” apart from past projects. With the love she typically writes about gone, she ascribes words with new meanings.



Adrienne Lenker’s cover for “songs” album

Amid a society becoming increasingly industrialized, “Cell Phone Says,” and “Donut Seem,” emphasize the importance of human connection amid the destruction of the environment. “Cell Phone Says” shares the details of a long-distance relationship, connected only by a nebulous system of electrical signals. Despite the distance, she can be with the other person through the change of seasons and “Meet in dreams by the lilac river.” In a future world pouring acid rain, Lenker suggests in

“Donut Seem” that “This whole world is dying/Don’t it seem like a good time for swimming/Before all the water disappears.” In line with this philosophy, she claims that if the love of a relationship is dying, being together until the very end is still a meaningful, fulfilling endeavor. The crux of “Bright Future” is found in “Ruined,” where Lenker’s definition of acceptance is only found after reckoning with missed opportunities, lost connections, and words not said. Lenker confesses, “I wish I’d waved when I saw you/I just watched you passing by.” The song is dragged by the recurring chorus, “So much coming through/Can’t get enough of you/You come around and I’m ruined.” The continued iteration of the same words identifies that, while the situation will never change, she is ultimately not restricted to the confines of the experience. “Bright Future” sees Adrienne Lenker at her best — telling stories central to who she is and what she envisions a life well-lived to be. The record is meticulous but not overly polished, and every lyric is profound without seeming contrived. Lenker ends the record on a note of heavy impermanence, recounting that the last days are never to be known. Despite this, she emphasizes the importance of mundane connection and undying love.



Adrienne Lenker’s cover for new “Bright Future” album

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AP Lit & DE English Instructor  
jbpruett@henrico.k12.va.us



Rant Wrapped

The Mad Mav  
The Commentator

It has been a rough year. Is it March? Yes. Have three months of the year already gone by? Yes, but don't you dare invalidate me. Obviously, you all have been subject to every bit of my anger — you've heard my thoughts on ants, the SAT, and movies. But what you don't know is that between every issue, something new brings my blood pressure up. Thus, in the manner of Spotify, I want to give you a recap of all the things that had me contemplating nuclear warfare.

First up: TikTok. I hate the way it makes everyone talk the same and I especially find it skin-crawling when I see people doing TikTok dances just in public. I have no problem with you filming a TikTok in the great outdoors, be my guest! But to just stand in line somewhere and then to just start doing the renegade ... this is the kind of stuff people got sent to the witch trials for.

Money. The fact that I don't have more of it. The fact that it exists at all. Bitcoin. The stock market. It is CRAZY to me that the world revolves around a skinny little slice of tree. I may or may not be able to go to certain colleges because of tree slices. What's going on here? Don't get me wrong, I'm pretty fickle when it comes to the green. I love it when I have it and I hate it when I don't. Such is the duality of man, IG.

Math. You guys, I hate math SO much. It feels criminal sometimes to be sitting in my class — it's criminal that a girl this cute is forced to own a TI-84! Seriously? I hate that numbers exist. Why can't we just use emojis and hieroglyphics or something? Falcon snake urn sun — guess what I just said. But TBH, I've always been really bad at math. Like, really bad. I took this intelligence test that the astronauts take to qualify them for their space journey, and I bombed it because it was all math! NASA, babe, I don't think the aliens will be talking to me about calculus or the order of operations.

Truthfully, there are so many more things that really grind my gears — sports, vegetables, racism, politics, cajun seasoning to fry ratio, and diabetes. Through my anger, I see the hidden truth: the world is going to end and we're all going to die. But also, the world is going to end and we're all going to die! So let ALLLLLLL those feelings out and if anyone asks who told you you could talk like that, give 'em a wink and tell 'em it was your big sister, the Mad Mav.

XOXO,  
THE Mad Mav

Richmond's Concert Venues Hit the Right Note

Ava Flournoy  
Graphics Editor

The music scene in Richmond has only improved over the years, from the addition of concert venues and festivals to the ever-growing crowd of music fans. Many concert goers have found their favorite place, one they will frequent at any excuse. After years of concerts, I have finally found my favorite venue.

But let's start with my least favorite ... The Broadberry. The location is decent; downtown RVA is always a beautiful place, but the parking ... oh boy, is that a mess. It is almost impossible to find a spot in their actual parking lot and street parking poses the possibility of getting towed or ticketed. I've had my fair share of hoping and praying that I come back to my car after finding a somewhat legal spot. This only addresses the outside of the venue — the inside is a whole other story.

I want to make clear that I still enjoy The Broadberry. It is a decent venue that houses lots of artists I love, but I can only appreciate the concert so much if I can't see what's on stage. If you are familiar with The Broadberry, you know what I am referring to ... yes, that one pole. There is a support beam in the middle of the crowd and, even if you are lucky enough to find yourself behind a short person, chances are you will still have an obstructed view. I would rate The Broadberry a 6/10.

The Altria Theater allows for off-Broadway performances (I count this as a concert experience, to an extent), as well as comedy shows and more relaxed concerts. I have noticed, though, that when people attend a concert here, there is no dancing or singing — it becomes more of a watching experience. That being said, this venue gets points for its beautiful architecture. I would rate the Altria Theater a 7.2/10.

The Tin Pan and places similar to it, such as The Reveler and Richmond Music Hall, offer a more intimate experience with the bands that perform there. It becomes more of a sit-down concert that allows fans to really experience the music and band. I enjoy these venues because it offers a personal connection between the fans and musicians, although I sometimes prefer a crowd that is not afraid to dance or sing along loudly. With these features in mind, I would rate these venues a 7.5/10.

The next venue is The Canal Club, specifically the basement, as I have yet to go on the main floor. Similar to The Broadberry, there are a few support beams that block the view in about four places. While this is annoying, they make up for it with the available tables and chairs, which al-



PHOTO: JOHNNY FLOURNOY

The exterior of The National

low more people to sit and enjoy a show. This also leaves more room in the pit and a smaller chance of having an obstructed view. The Canal Club is like those candies in your grandmother's purse: not your first choice, but always a pleasant experience. I would rate The Canal Club a solid 8/10.

Richmond and the surrounding area have been fortunate enough to have larger venues pop up. The Virginia Credit Union LIVE! offers an amphitheater-like design. With the venue outside and partially covered, it is beautiful during the spring and summer concert season. The location was originally used as the old fair grounds, but transforming it into a concert venue has made RVA a destination for more well-known acts. In the past year alone, popular bands like Pierce the Veil and Train have appeared at the amphitheater. Having attracted such prominent acts, the Virginia Credit Union LIVE! scores an 8.5/10.

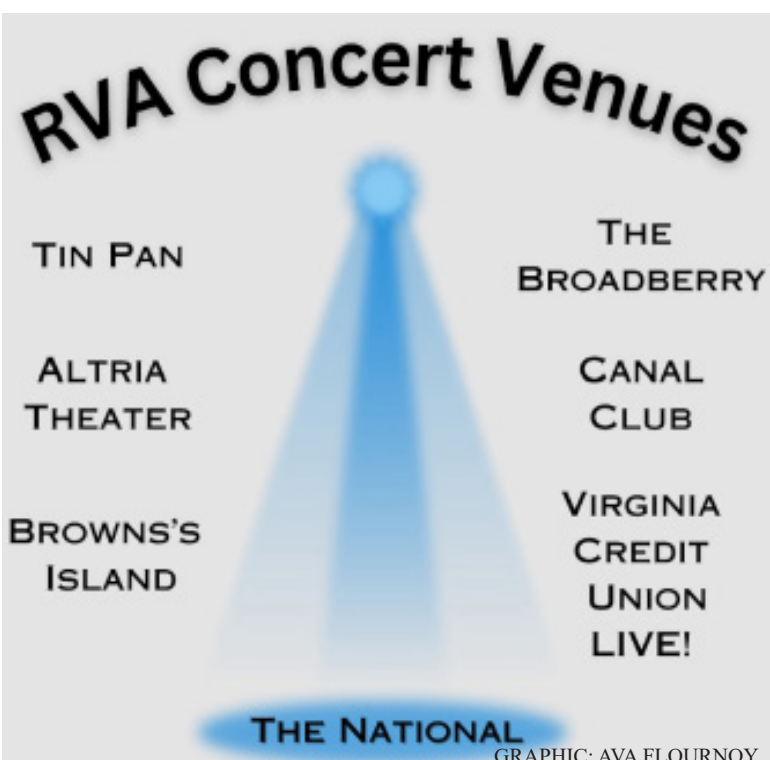
As the warmer seasons approach, outdoor venues such as Maymont and Brown's Island begin bustling with activity. Not to mention the Bon Secours Training Center, which held Iron Blossom last summer (fingers crossed for yet another amazing lineup). Outdoor concerts create a positive feel like no other. Events like Live Loud and Friday Cheers on Brown's Island are full of up-and-coming artists and, occasionally, feature some bigger names. Fri-

day Cheers starts up this year on May 3 and will continue through June. Collectively, RVA's outdoor venues get a solid 9/10 from me.

Lastly, my favorite, a tried and true, reliable option ... The National. The love I have for this place is like that of a second home. From the unobstructed views and cheap, close parking, to the wide variety of performing artists, it is by far the best venue in RVA. The National has seating upstairs for the parents that were dragged along (thanks, Dad), water that is easily purchasable, and a typically lively

crowd. It truly has all the components that make a concert what it should be. I have enjoyed numerous concerts at The National, and every time, the staff is friendly and the guests display proper concert etiquette. Hands down, The National deserves a 10/10.

With projects like the Riverfront Amphitheater in motion, RVA's music scene is continuing to grow. Richmonders have been lucky to have access to the venues available so far, each one providing a unique and positive experience overall.



Scott's Shawarma: You Had Me at Meat Tornado

Shishira Nakka  
Centerspread Editor

It was a beautiful Tuesday afternoon when I walked along the cobbled roads of the Fan. The smell of spices and pure joy wafted through the air as I followed the feta-brick road to a little shop that held the key to happiness — Scott's Shawarma.

The restaurant specializes in Middle Eastern cuisine, and it is dazzling. The menu features three meat options: chicken shawarma, beef and lamb shawarma, and a mix of both. You can choose to have your fix over rice, in pita, or as a sandwich. If you don't eat meat, falafel is a great vegetarian option. Or, if you're in the mood for something light, you can order hummus, a Greek salad, kebab, kobe — a Middle Eastern rice ball — or America's favorite, wings and fries.

Since my opinion is the only one that matters, I put Scott's Shawarma to the test and recorded my experience. I tried the chicken shawarma over rice, the lamb and beef in a pita, the hummus, the Greek salad, and the falafel over rice. You might be wondering what my qualifications are. I'll have you know I've watched "The Bear" at least



PHOTO: RICHMOND MAGAZINE

Exterior of Scott's Shawarma

four times, I'm currently rereading "Kitchen Confidential," AND I'm really good at eating — one could say I put a lot away for a little lady.

First up on the chopping block: the chicken over rice. The plate came with a side of hummus and pickled vegetables. One thing to know about me: I hate vegetables. Just thinking of them makes my skin crawl. However, these vegetables — pickled cucumber (but not quite pickles), tomato, lettuce, and onions — were actually amaz-

ing. When combined with the rice, which was seasoned to perfection so as to not overpower the shawarma, they became a masterpiece. The chicken shawarma itself was a thing of beauty, evenly coated in spices. I loved it. Solid 8/10.

Let's review the sides. The hummus was a side for the chicken over rice, but also in a separate bowl. I loved how cold it was — it made everything I dipped ten times better. Drizzled with olive oil and a sprinkle of chili powder,

this thing was bussin.' The Greek salad? Also bussin.' It was so refreshing and I loved how fresh the feta tasted. For someone who doesn't like vegetables, this was a dish I could get behind. I also tried the falafel over rice. When it comes to a meal, I may die if there's not a cut of meat on there — if I ever ordered something vegetarian, it would be a sign that aliens had taken over my body. However, this falafel may be the exception. I loved how crispy it was, and paired with the rice, it made for a lovely meal. Overall, the sides were a solid 9/10. They paired perfectly with everything. Totally yummilicious.

Finally, my favorite, the lamb and beef shawarma with pita. Oh. My. God. The shawarma? Tender. The pita? Soft as SKIMS. The tahini? Replacing holy water. Somewhere in between the bites I took, I had something akin to a religious experience. This pita shawarma was one of the best things I've ever had. 10/10. Showstopping. Amazing.

My favorite part of this whole thing, other than the pita, was that the employee came over and gave me two sauces to try — for free! Something else to know about me is that, while I hate vegetables, I love free stuff. I got to try the garlic sauce and their homemade hot sauce. Let me just say, I will never be the same. The garlic

sauce? Incredible. The hot sauce? Close to being an atomic bomb.

Scott's Shawarma does it right. They know how to maintain consistent flavor profiles in their dishes, entice their customers with a colorful menu, and make me happy — these are not easy things to do. They ate it up and left no crumbs — and so did I.



PHOTO: SHISHIRA NAKKA

Chicken shawarma over rice and beef and lamb in pita



PHOTO: SHISHIRA NAKKA

Falafel plate



# Denise Martin: A Beloved Freeman Bus Driver

**Maya Thlachak**  
Staff Writer

Often, our Freeman bus drivers are overlooked despite the vital role they hold in the school community. Denise Martin has been a Freeman bus driver for 17 years and continues to make a substantial impact on the lives of Freeman students. Although Ms. Denise only carries a handful of students to and from Freeman, she takes pride in her role in the Freeman community. “I would not be able to go to school without her,” said Cash Leimberger, a Freeman junior on Ms. Denise’s bus. Throughout her years as a driver, Ms. Denise has grown very close to her students aboard the bus. “They’re a very positive bunch of kids and I try to be very positive toward them,” said Ms. Denise. “I had them last year and then again this year; we’re a very close-knit family.” Ms. Denise has also excelled at providing herself as a resource for her students. “Besides the fact that she drives me around, I feel like I can talk to her about anything,” said Cruz Leimberger-



PHOTO: HENRICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

One of the Henrico County School Buses outside of Freeman.

er, a freshman on Ms. Denise’s bus. He expressed his gratitude for her hard work by getting her a birthday present. “I just felt like she deserved it,” said Cruz. Rather than solely maintaining her bus, route, and students, Ms. Denise seeks to create personal connections with her students. “She is always asking me how my day is going and what I’m going to do today; she is very conversational,” said Cash. “You can never tell if she had a bad day.” Ms. Denise also takes time out of her busy schedule to paint rocks for her bus riders. These

delights are sourced from her garden and nearby parks. They are meticulously painted with different images, such as school buses, nature, and heartwarming phrases. “[They] make us feel important,” said Cruz. “She definitely cares about her students.” As the head of the bus, drivers are expected to make their students’ safety a top priority. “We make sure they’re in a safe place,” said Ms. Denise. Before her elementary, middle, and high school routes, Ms. Denise wakes up at 5 a.m. to complete a pre-trip. “You have to walk around your bus,

check your tires, check your lights, pull the hood, check your coolant, your unit, and obviously do an air brake test,” said Ms. Denise. Then, she hits the gas and completes her route promptly. “I’ve never been late in 17 years,” she said.

Her “on the road” duties come with more than just steering the wheel. As a bus driver, it is vital to be aware of your outside surroundings along with the internal affairs on the bus. “You have to be aware of the other drivers, people walking, the kids that are walking and riding bikes, and wild animals wandering out in front of them. It’s a lot to oversee,” said Ms. Denise. “You’re also scanning your mirrors every eight seconds and watching the kids on the bus.”

When it comes to safety concerns such as incidents between students, extreme weather, and other hazards, drivers are instructed to relocate to a controlled environment. “We’re supposed to go into a safe place. We all know where they are: schools, fire stations, churches,” said Ms. Denise. As a driver, whether on or off the clock, the student’s safety takes precedence. “Years ago, we had a tornado ... I was doing my middle school route at the time, and it just so happened I was really close to

Crestview Elementary; so we went there,” she said. “It was about 7 p.m. before I made it home.”

Ms. Denise’s hard work and open mind are valued by students and parents within the Freeman community. “Ms. Denise is open-minded and she will listen and respect whatever her students say,” said Cruz. “She’s a very positive person.”

As Ms. Denise completes her 17th year of driving for Henrico County, she does not have any plans to call it quits. “I absolutely love all my kids, my parents ... I’m not leaving to somewhere I probably won’t be as happy,” said Ms. Denise.



Ms. Denise’s rock paintings.

# DSF Dominates Dancing

**Scotty Gregory**  
Staff Writer

Dance is a widespread form of expression around the globe. Whether it be for religious reasons, community-building, or recreational purposes, dance serves as a form of communication in cultures and between them. The Latinx Dance Group at Freeman is a prime example of just that. The club is composed of 11 students. They welcome everyone ready to have a good time dancing and form connections with the people around them. Latin dancing consists of a variety of dances including the Salsa, the Rumba, the Cha-Cha,

and the Bachata. Characteristics of this style of dance are fast-paced, passionate, fiery, and flashy choreography. The music is festive, lively, and upbeat to match the energetic dancing. There is never a dull moment watching a Latin dance performance.

The club first started as a branch of the High School Organization for Latine Awareness (HOLA) club. The members of HOLA wanted there to be a club solely based on dancing, and they achieved just that. From their initial Culture Day dance, the club has blossomed. The dancers now perform at end-of-quarter pep rallies and Freeman’s annual Culture Day celebration, put on by DSF Equity Ambassadors.

The Latinx Dance Club is formed

of students who are predominately fluent in Spanish. For some, being in an English-based learning environment can be difficult. The club is a space where the members can relax and blow off some steam during the day. “I think a nice part of this is it can be a brain break [from speaking English],” said Señorita Snellings, the club’s sponsor.

For students new to Freeman, the club is a great way to form friendships. The common consensus among the current group is that most members were already friends beforehand, but the experience has only brought them closer together. Many of them heard about the club through friends who had already joined. “They’re all so close,” said Señorita Snellings.

Like most aspects of daily life, Covid-19 had a big effect on the club. It was founded in 2019, just before Covid hit. Pre-Covid, the group would average almost 40 students per meeting, but that number has since decreased significantly. Now, meeting attendance ranges from six to 12 students.

The pressure of performing at pep rallies can be overwhelming for some, and the club members take that into account. Many students join to dance for fun and bond with others but do not want to perform at pep rallies. The club gladly welcomes these students but asks that they are willing to step back while the dancers are finalizing plans for performances.

Like all clubs, it is a great way for individuals to come out of



GRAPHIC: AVA FLOURNOY

their shell. It is obvious to Señorita Snelling and other dancers that some members have become much more comfortable and social since joining the club. “Especially the leaders, who’ve been members for longer. As members get older, they ... pass the torch,” said Señorita Snellings. “To see them step into the leadership role has been really cool.”

After Covid-19, it was easy for all students to feel a bit more reserved and nervous about school. The club has helped return a sense of normalcy and comfort to the members. “Get[ting] back into the routine of meet-

ing together in physical spaces has been helpful for [the members],” said Señorita Snellings.

The Latinx club is almost entirely student-led. The members handle the choreography and decision-making, while Senorita Snellings helps with scheduling, music, and costumes.

The club members meet every Tuesday and Thursday during Freeman Focus outside of Señorita Snellings’s room to choreograph. The main choreographers are Aleisha Cervantes and Luisa Lopez. They often meet in the small gym to replicate the environment in which they will perform.



PHOTO: SCOTTY GREGORY

Members from the Latinx Dance Group

# Zack Hunnicutt: From COVID College to the United States Coast Guard

**Matthew Wozniak**  
Staff Writer

Four-year college, two-year college, trade school, the military — every year we get that presentation from counseling about the ever-approaching end to our K-12 education. Zack Hunnicutt — the son of Ms. Hunnicutt, a Freeman English teacher — has found that in his life through the military.

After graduating from Collegiate School, Zack has spent the last two years traveling overseas with the Coast Guard to locations including Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman. “The chance came up for me to go through some training at Marine Corp Base Camp Lejeune in order to be sent to the Middle East and I jumped on the opportunity,” said Zack. “The Coast Guard is unique in that I volunteered to be deployed overseas. Unlike in a different branch, this was completely my choice.”

While overseas, no two days were the same. “I could have watch [duty] from midnight until 4 a.m. and then go to work from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or I could have a seemingly regular 9-5,” he said. While in the Middle East, he was assigned to many different tasks, ranging from mechanical

work on ships to anti-terrorism efforts in the Persian Gulf. “The insanity of my life is one thing that I have grown to appreciate in the Coast Guard,” said Zack. “There is never a dull moment.”

Over the last few years, Zack’s life has been more hectic than he was expecting. “The thing that has surprised me the most about my life since graduating high school is the amount of places that I have [traveled] in such a short time,” he said. “I have lived in four different American cities and two different countries. I have traveled to eight different countries all in the span of the almost three years I have been in the military.” These opportunities have allowed Zack to meet many new people, including his wife and some of his best friends.

Now back in the United States, Zack is currently taking classes at the Coast Guard Training Center in Yorktown, Virginia. “I wake up for [Physical Training] at 4:30 a.m. on Monday and Wednesday and 6:30 a.m. for the rest of the week, and go to class until 3 p.m.,” said Zack. “It kind of mirrors a regular school schedule.”

During his high school career, Zack initially planned to go to a four-year college, graduate, and get a job like he thought “everyone else did.” After one year at Hampden-Sydney College, the

COVID-19 pandemic began and things started to change. Zack felt that virtual school did not align with his educational expectations. “My school went to online learning and that, along with paying for what felt like a half education, didn’t really feel right,” he said.

Zack’s inspiration for joining the military stemmed from his grandfather. “He was in the Navy and was one of the biggest role models I had growing up,” said Zack. “I always admired the way he conducted himself and the steadfast integrity that he had.” To Zack, it seemed like

his grandfather “had it figured out,” so Zack decided to enlist.

It is important to consider all your options if you are interested in joining the military. “Don’t get pigeonholed into a branch of service because you have family pressure or peer pressure to do so,” he said. “The military can do awesome things for you, but it’s easier if you can find purpose in the job that you are doing in the service.”

Networking is important in the military, just like any other career. “The military is all about meeting new people, and that can be daunting sometimes,” said Zack.



PHOTO: ZACK HUNNICUTT

Zack (second from left) with the first ever female Commandant in the Coast Guard.



Celia Acey  
Sports Editor

Mama J's Kitchen

A beacon of history and family, Mama J's Kitchen lies in the Jackson Ward district, one of Richmond's historically African-American neighborhoods. Since opening in 2009, Mama J's has been offering a comforting and warm atmosphere through their irresistible soul food.

The story of Mama J's began during the childhood of Velma Johnson, AKA Mama J. Living in Richmond's West End, Velma grew up helping her mother and grandmother in the kitchen. Five decades later, one of Velma's sons, Lester Johnson, along with his best friend, Jonathan Mayo, decided to open Mama J's in an effort to spark growth and a sense of community in the neighborhood.

As soon as I walked through the door, I was greeted with a warm smile and led to a table along the wall of the restaurant. Despite it being 8:00 PM on a Wednesday, the restaurant was bustling with people laughing and enjoying their food.

I ordered the fried chicken, which was served with a corn muffin. The chicken was definitely the star of the show — the meat was extremely moist and coated in a delicious, savory blend of seasonings that made the crispy outside even more delectable. This was definitely the best fried chicken I've ever tasted! The corn muffin was warm and far from dry, the perfect combination of sweet and savory.

One of my friends who accompanied me, Freeman senior Wila Sharrar, ordered the macaroni n' cheese. "The pasta was cooked to al-dente perfection, with a rich cheese coating on the outside," said Willa.

Another friend of mine, Freeman senior Ellie Shugrue, ordered the crab cake sandwich, served with a corn muffin. "The crab cake sandwich was extremely fresh, and the perfect blend of savory flavors," said Ellie.

One of the best restaurants in Richmond, Mama J's is critically acclaimed. With appearances in Thrillist.com's "50 Restaurants to Try Before You Die," Richmond Magazine's "25 Best Restaurants in Richmond," and Style Weekly's "Best Soul Food Restaurant" three years in a row, it is no wonder the restaurant is constantly abuzz with locals and tourists alike. Mama J's has also been featured by ESPN, National Geographic, Southern Living, and a variety of local networks.

If you're ever searching for a comfort meal, Mama J's is the place to go. Their attentive and hospitable staff members help to create a cozy ambience for all, not to mention the fact that their food is some of the best in Richmond. I highly recommend giving Mama J's a try — you won't be disappointed!

Ella Post  
Online Editor-in-Chief  
A&E Editor

Lolita's

From tacos to octopus, Lolita's offers a wide variety of Mexican food in the heart of Carytown. Owned and operated by sisters Rosio and Karina Garcia, this restaurant is known for its amazing entrées, creative cocktails, and welcoming ambiance. The restaurant opens around 11 a.m. and closes at 9 or 10 p.m., depending on the day. Throughout the day, Lolita's serves brunch, lunch, and dinner options.

The restaurant combines traditional and modern cooking methods through nixtamalization, grain roasting, whole grain milling, and sourcing their corn from enterprises that work closely with small communities in Mexico. Not only does this provide delicious results, but it also increases the nutritional value of the dishes.

While I was unable to dine inside Lolita's, ordering the food to-go did not detract from its quality. Everything tasted fresh and the food was still warm, even after my drive home. The only item I had to reheat was the queso dip. I ordered two appetizers, two entrées, and three side dishes.

For the appetizers, I ordered chips with guacamole and queso. The chips are actually tostadas, made from fresh tortilla rounds that I got to break apart myself. Doing this allowed me to choose how big the chips were, which I enjoyed. I also found them easier to scoop with. The queso was not heavy or greasy and its cheese flavor was a perfect medium spice level. The guacamole was a 10/10. It was super fresh and had a great flavor with notes of lemon, lime, and cilantro. I highly recommend ordering these if you have the chance to go. Lolita's also offers grilled octopus as an appetizer, but I was not feeling brave enough to order it this trip.

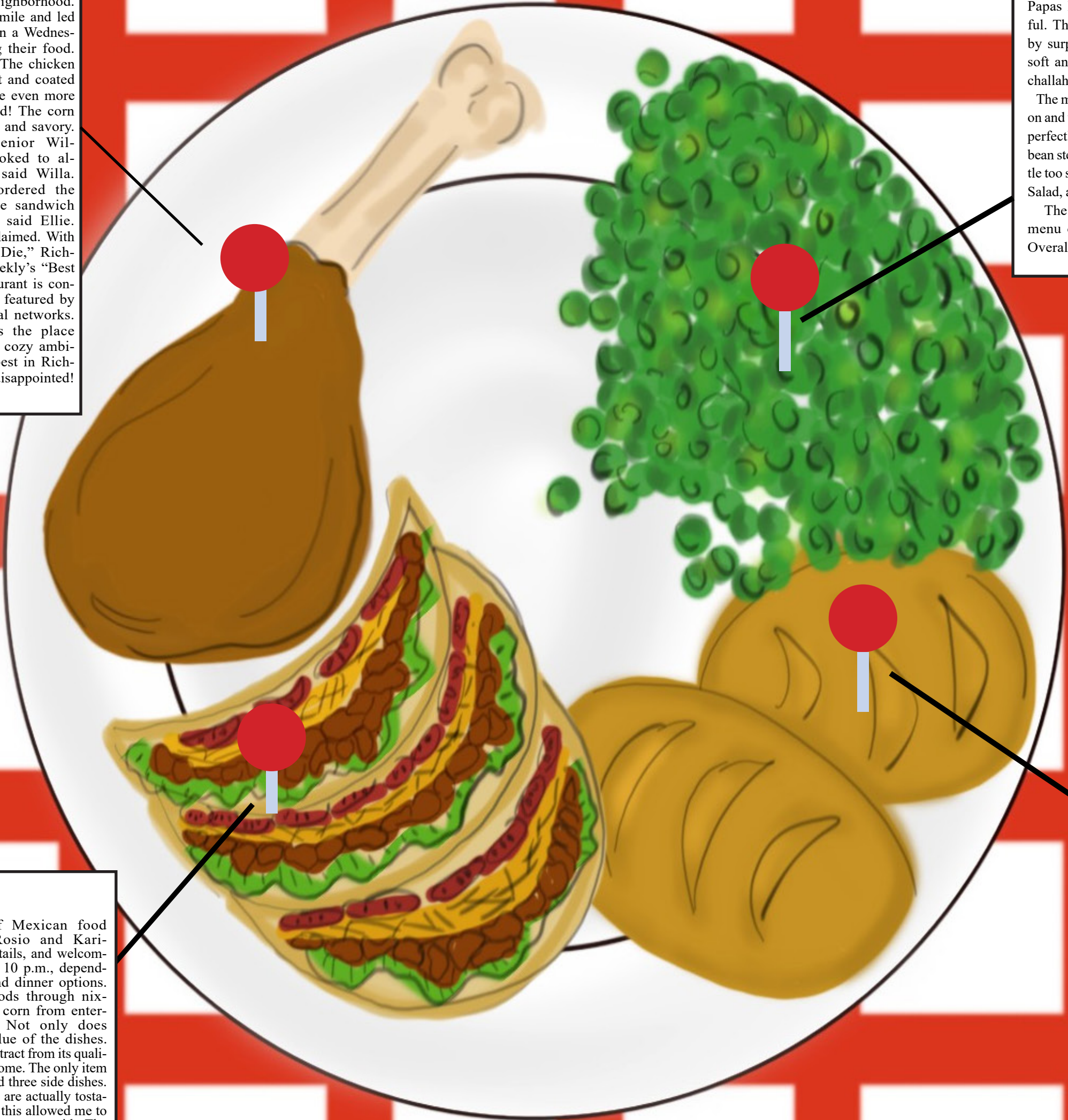
The entrées I ordered were the chicken quesadilla and pastor tacos. Their hand-pressed, fresh tortillas leveled up these dishes significantly. The quesadilla had flavorful Adobo chicken that tasted phenomenal and the portions were perfectly sized. As I mentioned earlier, the cheese they use is not super greasy, so I did not feel groggy after eating it. I LOVED the pastor tacos. The marinated pork had an amazing flavor and texture. The taco was topped with a fruity salsa and a piece of grilled pineapple, adding the slightest hint of sweetness. I would rate the quesadilla an 8/10 and the tacos a 9/10.

Next, I ordered their rice, beans, and brussel sprouts (my personal favorite). The brussel sprouts were super crispy and topped with vinaigrette, enhancing the flavor profile by adding a touch of acidity. The rice was standard, but the re-fried black beans, topped with cotija cheese, were exceptional. Normally I am not a big fan of beans, but I will definitely order these again the next time I visit Lolita's.

Overall, the queso, guacamole, and quesadilla were a tad bit expensive for the portion sizes, but their freshness and quality made up for it and I enjoyed everything I tasted. My favorite dish was definitely the pastor tacos with the hand pressed tortillas. The freshness of the tortillas and flavor of the pork complimented each other very well, making it the star of the show. Even though Lolita's is a little pricey, the food's superior taste and phenomenal presentation make it a worthwhile stop whenever you're craving Mexican food.

I will definitely be back soon to try some of the brunch and dessert menus. Who knows, I may even get the courage to finally try the grilled octopus! If you're looking for a stylish restaurant with a friendly atmosphere and high quality food, Lolita's is the perfect spot for any occasion.

Taste Around the World!



Hannah Tittermary  
Mav Minute Editor-in-Chief

Jewfro

JewFro, a new Jewish and African cultural fusion restaurant in Richmond, offers a welcoming atmosphere of kind servers and light conversation. By combining traditional Jewish and African dishes, each meal is a completely new experience.

The appetizers were definitely the highlight of the evening. Perfectly warm and delectable, the challah — a rich bread of Ashkenazi Jewish origin — mixed a common comfort food with fresh, herby butters and dips, creating a deliciously unique flavor. Don't get me started on the Sumac Papas Bravas. This potato dish was perfectly crispy, savory, and flavorful. The last appetizer we ordered was the Akara Falafel, which took me by surprise. While crispy and fried on the outside, the first bite was very soft and smooth. The flavor combination was similar to the dips with the challah: light and natural. Definitely a good snack for a hot summer's day.

The meals were just as incredible. In particular, the Moroccan Merguez Salmon and the Peri Peri Chicken were a burst of flavor and texture. The salmon was perfectly cooked and balanced very well with the Loubia, a Moroccan white bean stew, and Chakalaka, a South African relish. Though the Peri Peri was a little too spicy for my taste, it was very fresh. Paired with Jollof CousCous, Israeli Salad, and coconut sauce, it was a very enticing spread of textures and flavors.

The service was fantastic. Our server was kind and helpful with the menu options and checked up on the table at just the right moments. Overall, JewFro was a very pleasant experience and I would go again!

Merrick Mock  
News Editor

Lemon Cuisine of India

Like many others, I am on a mission to expand my palate. Indian food has been at the top of the "want to try" list in my notes app for as long as I can remember, and Lemon Cuisine of India was the perfect beginning of my new food fixation.

This was my first time trying Indian food, so I was unsure of what to order for my main course. The waiter recommended that I try the butter chicken, chicken tikka masala, butter naan, garlic naan, and, of course, their rice. I can typically tolerate a tad bit of spice, but I was still nervous that I wasn't going to be able to take the heat so I ordered a "2" on the spice scale for both chicken dishes.

I started my tastings with the garlic and butter naan. The flatbreads had a very light, fluffy, and fresh texture. The butter naan was simple, while the garlic version was bursting with flavor. Even better was the combination of the garlic naan with one of my chicken dishes and rice. I honestly could have eaten 10 pieces of garlic naan and called it a day.

The butter chicken was also amazing, with a very rich and creamy texture. The unique blend of spices gave it a complex, delicious flavor. At first, it was sweet and tangy, but the aftertaste left the perfect bit of spiciness on my tongue.

The chicken tikka masala was a lot more spicy than the butter chicken, in a good way. It had a slight lemon kick at first, but the heat kicked in after about five seconds of it being in my mouth. The contrast of sweet and spicy chicken dishes paired perfectly with the rice and naan.

The rice, well, it tasted like rice. I feel like it's challenging to mess up making white rice. It wasn't anything special, but I don't have any complaints. The service was also great and all the workers were very friendly and accommodating.

Overall, Lemon Cuisine of India gets an A in my book and I would recommend it to anyone interested in trying Indian food.



## Freeman's Unofficial Official Photographer

**Connor Almstead**  
Staff Writer

From lacrosse to show choir to individual highlights, Sierra Hancock has taken a wide variety of pictures at Freeman over the last few years. Currently a senior, she has spent the majority of high school snapshotting the Mavericks' performances around the county. Sierra has gained the reputation of being able to capture the best moments of the student body; yet, she remains completely independent from the school.

When she first picked up the hobby, she only did it for fun. "I just started doing it and, eventually, people started asking me to come," she said. News of her photography spread by word of mouth and she quickly became known as the person to reach out to. Her unique style has an in-the-moment feeling, capturing the action that is happening in perfect detail.

Recently, Sierra has found another medium: senior portraits. To request a senior portrait, simply message her on Instagram @sierraphotography24. "She was compassionate and friendly, and I was completely satisfied with my photo," said senior Jane Garitz, who had a se-



PHOTO: @SIERRAPHOTOGRAPHY24

**Sierra's photograph from a girls varisty lacrosse game**

nior portrait session with Sierra.

Photography has added a lot to Sierra's life, as she has made close friends and gained newfound recognition. "It was great to meet new people in my school," she said. "I've had a bunch of parents reach out with compliments and additional requests." Sierra has greatly expanded whom she talks with on a daily basis compared to the beginning of her high school experience.

While Sierra doesn't plan to make it her full-time career, photography is "something I want to do for the rest of my life," she said.



PHOTO: MAGGIE JACOBY

**Sierra Hancock posing with a camera**

"I would definitely take it as [an] elective in college." For Sierra, the use of photography in communication jobs is worth noticing, and she believes the opportunity to work with people in that field would be beneficial to her future.

Sierra's love for the hobby started at a young age. While a toddler, "I always liked being in front of the camera," she said. Sierra always wanted to be in frame with her brother, sometimes posing. As she grew up, she started playing around with the camera herself. In middle school, she be-

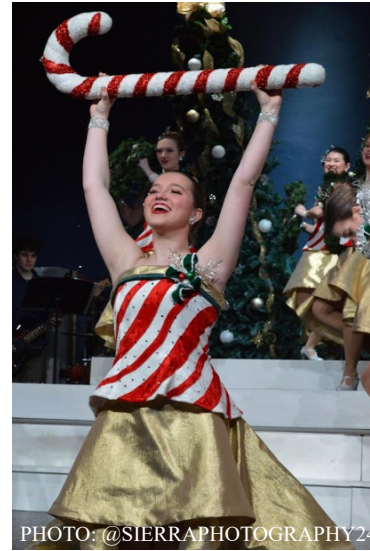


PHOTO: @SIERRAPHOTOGRAPHY24

**Sierra's photograph from the showchoir performance**

gan taking pictures around campus. "I joined my school's yearbook team in seventh grade," she said. "I became the photographic editor the following year."

When COVID-19 closed down schools, Sierra found ways to keep getting shots. With all of the extra time at home, "I took more pictures of nature and my friends when I could," she said. After her parents noticed her serious passion for the camera, they surprised her with a professional camera for her 16th birthday.

During her high school years, Si-

erra took three years of photography. In that time, Sierra grew close with Mrs. Buchbinder, Freeman's photography teacher. "She's really grown my ability to capture the best out of a moment," she said.

Along with the class, Sierra would use her new camera at any point she could, and started taking pictures of games she was able to attend. The main two sports she photographs are track and field, which she participates in, and soccer, which her brother, Dawson Hancock, plays. Over time, she began to branch out by attending more games and constantly learning how to improve her craft.

Now, she publishes her work on her Instagram account and takes requests via direct messaging for almost any topic or occasion. Sierra stressed the importance of consistency for people trying to get into photography. "Just keep doing it," she said. "Each new moment gives you a new experience to learn from." She believes that her shots could not have gotten to the level they are at now without years of tweaking and careful practice.

Sierra is grateful for the many opportunities that the camera has provided her with. "I'm really glad I found photography," she said. "It has turned into something bigger than I imagined."

## Biking With the Broad Street Bullies

**Sarah Chilton**  
Staff Writer

Although the Broad Street Bullies (BSB) may sound intimidating, participants say the group is anything but. Founded in 2019, the community cycling group goes on rides through the city every Thursday evening once the weather warms up. The group's goal is to create a space where people can ride bikes without fear and raise awareness about the lack of bike accessibility in Richmond.

The group's course begins at the Carytown Kroger around 7 p.m. and ends at the Oregon Hill Overlook. They ride for "an hour or two on a predetermined path [with] people blocking intersections so that cars don't go," said junior Will Jones, who has participated in a handful of rides. The group consists of around 300 bikers that stretch "probably half a mile long," he said.

Since its establishment a few years ago, BSB has grown enormously. According to Turner Phaup, a senior who regularly attends, the first time he went he could "actually count how many people there were." Now, it has grown to around 150 consistent faces and involves thousands. "I've stood on the corner when people are going around and it takes five to six minutes for everybody to pass; it's like watching a train go by," said Turner. People typically get involved are through friends or social media.

Turner came to his first meeting because of an Instagram post he

saw last year by @broadstreetbullies804, which has over 9,000 followers. Others, like Will Jones and John Vogel, a junior who has been involved for around six months, were invited by friends. "My friends were going every Thursday last year, then they invited me and I loved it," said Will.

Will described the group as a community. Both Turner and George Tobin, a senior who has been riding with the group for over a year, agree that BSB is all love. "At the end of the day, it doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, what you're doing, what you're peddling, none of that matters," said George. "The biggest thing is that you come out there and be a part of the community and you ride your bike."

BSB as a whole is a "pretty di-

verse group of people," said John. Bikers range from 6 to 75 years old including all races, genders, and modes of transportation. It is not uncommon to see parents with bike trailers among the group.

Participating in BSB is open to any wheeled object without a gas motor. Turner has seen pedal bikes, cycles, mopeds, one-wheels, and rollerblades, just to name a few. There are also participants who chose more atypical vehicles, such as "a couch on wheels, a group of guys with hoverboards that they put lawn chairs on, scooters, LED skateboards, and a three-person tandem bike," said Will.

For those concerned about safety, "As long as you understand how to operate two wheels and your head is on a swivel, it's safe," said George. "You're surrounded



PHOTO: GEORGE (OTTO) TOBIN

**Members from the Broad Street Bullies going for a ride.**



PHOTO: GEORGE (OTTO) TOBIN

**A member from the Broad Street Bullies popping a wheelie.**

by the largest cycling group in Richmond who have front runners, back runners, and people on the side closing down intersections and blocking off traffic so that everybody moves through the city safely and without issue." The group has also built a relationship with the Richmond Police Department. "They have seen it ... executed safely so many times now, they have just accepted that there is nothing they can do about a group that large," he said.

Public opinion of BSB is mixed. Some dislike BSB because they view them as impeding traffic. However, "once it gets into the swing of things and people are used to seeing the group every Thursday night, they will make a [point] to go see them," said George. "People [line] the streets going crazy and are just so stoked to see everybody on bikes."

BSB is local but the 'wheelie craze' is a worldwide phenomenon that started seven or eight years ago. "Broad Street Bul-

lies is an extremely popular ride out across the United States," said George. "Some of the leaders have even gone up to New York to do BSB ride-outs [there] It's on the national stage, people all over the US are seeing it and [wondering] what these guys in Richmond are doing."

Will's advice to students who want to get involved is to follow BSB's Instagram account and just show up. "Within five minutes, I guarantee there's a group of people that would just start talking to you," he said. On the ride-outs, there are people "doing tricks at the front, but you don't have to participate in that, you can just ride and that's still super fun," said Will.

Other participants shared Will's sentiments. "[BSB] is genuinely the kindest and most wholesome environment possible," said Turner. A play on the traditional meaning of the word, BSB suggests that perhaps being a "bully" isn't such a bad thing after all.

## Fostering Future Freeman Students: The Birth of the Babysitters Club

**Kristen Carpenter**  
Staff Writer

On Jan. 22nd, 2024, the Babysitters Club was officially started by co-presidents, Edwyna Blay and Marie Vaughns, and vice president, Kie Lugo. The Babysitters Club serves two central purposes: to provide a helping hand during school events where teachers require childcare support and to foster a sense of responsibility, maturity, and community service among students at Freeman.

The idea started when "Edwyna and I volunteered for the parents' night and we realized that there was a severe lack of volunteers" said junior Marie Vaughns. Typically, Freeman faculty have a few events throughout the school year to socialize and boost employee morale. When these events occur or when parent-teacher conferences happen, teachers often bring their children to Freeman's library to be watched while they are unavailable. While Big Siblings and general volunteers usually cover the needed amount of help, there has been a significant shortage of volunteers this year.

At parents' night, "there were six volunteers and a lot of children running everywhere," said

Marie. It was that night that Edwyna, Marie, and Kie decided that the Freeman community needed a consistent source of students willing to volunteer for these events.

The Babysitters Club offers free babysitting services for staff members' children, allowing Freeman faculty to focus on their professional responsibilities without the worry of childcare. "Some teachers desperately need that help," said Marie.

The club not only provides a valuable service but also fosters leadership and personal development among its members. The Babysitters Club offers Freeman students a unique opportunity to develop their childcare skills. "The responsibility makes you more mature as a person," said senior Kie Lugo.

With activities designed to be both educational and fun for the kids — such as face painting, drawing, and legos — the club ensures an enriching experience for both kids and club members. "Most of our activities are centered around what [members] enjoyed as a kid," said Edwyna, another senior at Freeman. Members enjoy sharing parts of their childhood with the kids that they take care of to create a bond with the children.

While many of their roles work interchangeably, Edwyna, Marie,

and Kie all serve specific purposes in the club. Edwyna organizes meeting activities and runs the majority of the social media aspect of the club. "I really like planning and creatively putting things into a whole event," said Edwyna. Marie helps facilitate the meetings and coordinates the event logistics.

Kie is in charge of the actual childcare. "I used to work at the YMCA as a childcare attendant, so I am certified in childcare and I did all of my first aid classes," said Kie. "I also dealt with kids there that had special needs." The three leaders' unique talents have created a cohesive club that can smoothly operate.

Beyond the logistical and operational aspects of the club, the leaders' goal is to make a lasting impact on the school community. From introducing kids to activities like Just Dance to instilling maturity among Freeman student volunteers, the Babysitters Club aims to enrich the lives of its members. "Letting high schoolers get the opportunity to develop [childcare skills] and mature as a person ... it's a good skill to have," said Kie. The bonds that have formed between the members of the club and the children have also been very meaningful.

The club is still very new, so the



PHOTO: BABYSITTERS CLUB INSTAGRAM

**Members of the Babysitters Club at their first meeting.**

leaders are working to build up a large number of members. The frequency of meetings is still fluctuating as the club comes to life. "It started [out] as a bimonthly [meeting], but now it's when we're free," said Marie. Since Kie is a member of the ACE center while Edwyna and Marie are theater students, it can be challenging to find meeting times where they are all free. However, they still make sure to have at least one meeting each month.

The Babysitters Club is currently hoping to attract more members for the end of the school year so that they can start off strong in the following year. While Kie and Edwyna will be graduating this year,

Marie plans on stepping up as the central leader of the club next year. "They're leaving me as a single mother to figure things out, but I think it's a heartwarming and sentimental thing," said Marie.

The club has been in the making for almost three years and has a bright future ahead. Exact plans for the club have not been set in stone, but the Babysitters Club has already begun to foster a spirit of volunteerism at Freeman by giving faculty a much-needed sense of support. The Babysitters Club is more than just a club, it is a movement towards a more connected, caring, and engaged Freeman community.



# Richmond Scores a Goal in the USL W League

**Libby Mercer**  
Staff Writer

For the first time since 2009, the Richmond Kickers will have a pre-professional women's soccer team in the United Soccer League Womens' (USL W) league. This team, called the Richmond Ivy Soccer Club, will give young, local female soccer players a chance to represent Richmond at City Stadium. Richmond has not had a team in the USL W since the Destiny League, who played from 2005 to 2009. This new team will be coached by former Destiny League player, Kimmy Cummings. Alongside her will be Sporting Director, Madeline McCracken, and Goalkeeper Coach, Amanda Forester. Chairman of the Richmond

Kickers, Rob Ukrop, played a major role in the decision to bring Richmond Ivy into the USL W. "Our men's team [has been] the longest running soccer franchise in the country since 1993," said Mr. Ukrop. "But we also want to have female role models in the [Richmond] community."

Players for the team will be chosen from in-state universities, such as James Madison University, Christopher Newport University, Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Richmond, Virginia Tech, and the University of Virginia. However, the roster will also include players from out-of-state colleges, such as the University of Tennessee, Long Island University, and Florida State University.

The roster for the Richmond Ivy is currently being developed by Madeline McCracken, the team's

Sporting Director. "I have had the opportunity to drive all across the state of Virginia to scout and recruit college players," said Ms. McCracken. "In addition, we have held two player combines, which were open tryouts available for players from all over the country to compete for a spot on the team."

Once the roster is fully established, Coach Cummings will focus on building the culture of the team. "The most important part is that we start to establish our style of play, our principles of play, and then just our overall team culture," said Coach Cummings. "Culture has been something we pay very close attention to as we build the team."

Coach Cummings is no stranger to the game of soccer. Having already experienced a professional soccer environment through the Richmond Destiny League, she has insight on how this team will benefit the new wave of young women playing on the Richmond Ivy. "[Playing on a professional team as a young player] gave me a higher level of intensity that I wasn't going to be able to find elsewhere against older players with more experience," said Coach Cummings. The main difference between the Richmond Destiny League and the Richmond Ivy, according to Coach Cummings, is the level of excitement this new team is receiving. "We didn't have [this much excitement] with the previous Destiny team," said Coach Cummings. "I would say the hype around the team is very well deserved, but to just a far



CREDIT: MANNION

Players huddle during the Combine

different level this go round."

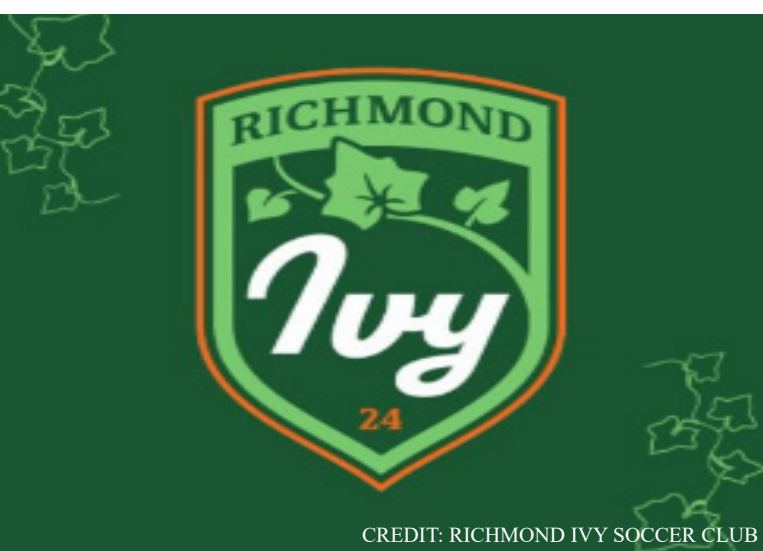
Most of the players joining Richmond Ivy grew up in or have connections to Richmond. "I am already friends with a lot of the girls whom I knew from when I played for Richmond United and Freeman," said Lauren Hargrove, a Freeman alumna and Virginia Tech goalkeeper. "I think I already have a good basis of friendship and trust with people on the team." Lauren is committed to the Richmond Ivy league and will play in its inaugural season.

Lauren played on the Freeman soccer team throughout her entire high school career. During her senior year on the Freeman soccer team, she and the team won a regional title. "[Winning a regional title] against Deep Run was probably my favorite moment of my soccer career [at Freeman], especially when I made two penalty kick saves in overtime," she said. For her, representing Richmond in the

USL W league is the most appealing aspect of joining Richmond Ivy. "I'm just so excited that I get to proudly represent Richmond, my hometown, and play in City Stadium," said Lauren.

Richmond Ivy has brought in goalkeeper Keely Thomas from Long Island University. As a returning Richmond local, Keely grew up going to City Stadium with her dad to watch the Richmond Kickers play. "The fact that now that there's availability for women to have their own role models in a pro team local to Richmond is an absolutely amazing development to me," said Keely. "I was raised looking up to these people [on the men's team] and now I could be one of those role models to somebody."

The Richmond Ivy will kick off at City Stadium on May 11, 2024. Make sure to come out and support the new team during their first season in the USL W league!



CREDIT: RICHMOND IVY SOCCER CLUB

Richmond Ivy Logo

# Caitlin Clark Makes Her Mark

**Julia Conner**  
Staff Writer

Three-time USA Basketball gold medalist, Caitlin Clark, is set to enter the 2024 Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) draft. The predicted number-one draft pick, Clark played all four seasons of her collegiate career as #22 on the Iowa Hawkeyes, breaking records and receiving numerous awards.

During the Hawkeyes' 93-83 win over No. 2 Ohio State, Clark broke the record for the most total points scored in Division I basketball with 3,685 points, surpassing Pete Maravich's previous record of 3,667 points.

In 2023, Clark received an Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly Award for Best Female College Athlete. That same year, she was named the Naismith Women's College Player of the Year. "I came to the University of Iowa with a dream of being here and competing for a national championship," she said during her acceptance speech.

Clark's goal was accomplished during the 2022-2023

season when the University of Iowa played against Louisiana State University (LSU) in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Women's Basketball National Championship. During this game, Clark scored a game-high 30 points, setting a new record for most points scored in a single NCAA tournament.

Nicknamed by some as the 'Caitlin Clark effect,' the Hawkeye senior has brought increased attention to women's basketball. During the Hawkeye's win over the Buckeyes, viewership peaked at 4.42 million, becoming the most-watched women's college basketball game in Fox Sports' history. Furthermore, the 2023-2024 women's college basketball regular season saw a 37 percent increase in viewership across ESPN platforms. "[Clark] has brought a lot of attention, especially [with] her breaking the records," said senior Meredith Stoneman, the Freeman girls basketball captain. "That not only brings more attention to Iowa but to women's basketball as a whole."

As the younger generation explores athletics, the increased interest in women's basketball can play a fundamental role in women's



Clark celebrates after winning the BIG10 Tournament

sports. "Participation in women's youth sports is down all across the country," said John Larkins, the Freeman girls basketball coach. "If women's basketball becomes popular, that means more young girls are playing basketball."

On the Colin Cowherd Pod-

cast, Fox Sports President of Insights and Analytics, Mike Mulvihill, discussed Clark's impact on women's basketball. "I think a permanent step forward has happened, and we're still going to see some pretty strong interest in the future," he said.

On Instagram, Clark acknowledged the support she has gotten and expressed her goal of inspiring girls. As she wrote a message announcing her entrance to the WNBA draft, she thanked her family, teammates, and coaches, specifically recognizing, "... everyone who came out to support [the Hawkeyes] across the country, especially the young kids," she said.

Many girls consider Clark a role model as they travel across the country to watch her play. The 2023-2024 season for the Hawkeyes Women's Team was sold out at both home and away games. At the Purdue vs. Iowa game, young girls held up homemade posters with phrases such as "From Grand Rapids, MI. to Purdue, I came here just for you #22" and "I drove 4 hours to see #22."

While Clark had numerous achievements during her collegiate career, "sometimes success in college doesn't equate to the professional ranks," said Coach Larkins. "Really good college players don't necessarily become the best professional players." As she navigates the WNBA the nation will be following her professional career.

# Performance Pickleball Tournament Raises Awareness About Colon Cancer

**Lizzie Herod**  
Online Editor-in-Chief

Hitting Cancer Below the Belt (HCB2), an organization that supports colon health and colorectal cancer prevention, invited the Richmond community to compete in a pickleball tournament on March 10, 2024. HCB2's Junior Board of high school students held the event at the newly developed Performance Pickleball RVA facility to raise the level of awareness about colorectal cancer prevention.

HCB2 was established in 2013 after the founder, Melinda Conklin, lost her husband to colorectal cancer. Its mission is to defeat colorectal cancer by offering education and services that will push people to take action. HCB2 arranges events throughout the year, such as the Boxer Brief 5K, the Blue Gene Bash, and Teeing Off On Cancer.

Since the pickleball tournament was a new fundraising event, HCB2 was unaware of the success and turnout it would garner. To their surprise, the sign-up form filled up within days of its publication. "Our goal was to get as many students, parents, and

teachers involved as possible," said Ms. Conklin. "We actually had to get an additional court because we had so much interest."

Instead of the tournament being based on a regular match system, they decided to implement a point system so that all participants would get an opportunity to play. "Our goal was that everybody would play four to five games," said Charlotte Gardner, a Freeman senior and HCB2 Junior Board member.

The HCB2 Junior Board's purpose is to inform and educate people about the deadly disease, especially those ages 14 and 15. "Those born after 1990 who are ages 20 to 39 are at a really high risk of colon cancer by the year 2030," said Ms. Conklin. "If we look at the year right now, that means 14 and 15 year olds are at risk because by the year 2030, it's going to be the number one cancer killer in our country."

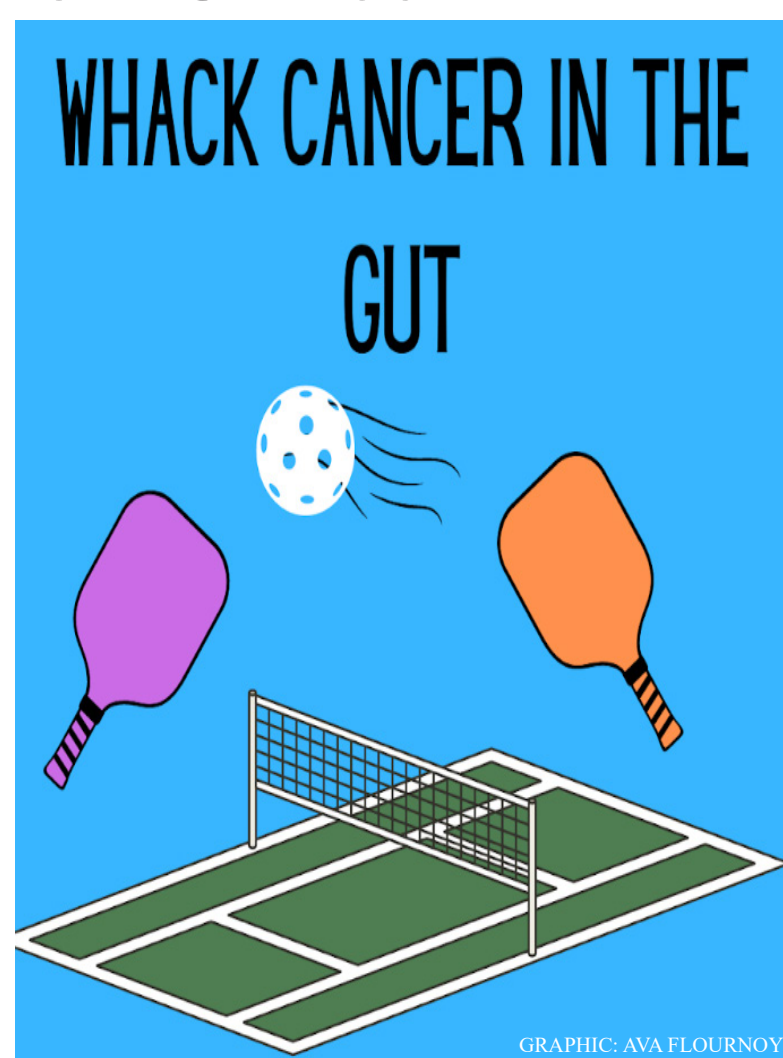
HCB2 provides and funds many services, including colorectal screening, for the medically underserved population. Screening events such as Free Colonoscopy Day, FluFit gatherings, and the continual Free Clinic Screening Program have brought early discovery to high-risk commu-

nities. In total, HCB2 funds 12 different medical sites across Virginia. They have raised over \$1 million in 10 years, all of which supports its educational initiatives and screening programs.

*"The number of diagnoses is growing exponentially."*  
- Ms. Conklin

Gut health and mindful eating have vital roles in reducing one's chances of colorectal cancer. "The number of diagnoses is growing exponentially, so what we're trying to do is not to scare anybody, but actually start talking about it and [let] people know the importance of gut health," said Ms. Conklin.

HCB2 will continue its efforts through the 12th annual Boxer Brief 5K, held on June 8, 2024. Like the pickleball tournament, this event helps to raise money and awareness about colorectal cancer. Due to the tournament's success, members of the Junior Board hope to bring the fundraiser back in the future. "The 'Whack Cancer in the Gut' pickleball tournament filled up the pickleball facility and [they] hope to see everyone on the courts next year," said Charlotte.



GRAPHIC: AVA FLOURNOY



Looking at Life in Different Colors

Katelyn Morrow  
Staff Writer

Karen Israel, a senior at Douglas Freeman High School and co-President of the Art Club, expresses her creativity in the art community through her leadership role. In her sophomore year, former Freeman art teacher, Molly McManus, invited Karen to go to a meeting of the Art Club. Karen ended up falling in love with the club and became the social media manager not long after. “I was able to explore my artistic ability, even though I wasn’t good at drawing,” said Karen. “I was able to find other things that I was good at, [while still being] considered an artist.” Through this exploration, she felt included in the art community and continued to expand her interests. During her junior year, Karen took Ceramics 1 with Mrs. Jones. She took this class because “[she] was able to explore ceramics more, learn new skills, and develop [her] creativity,” said Karen. Now, she is a Ceramics 2 student with Mrs. Hulbert, where she is constantly learning new skills that she hopes to



PHOTO: KAREN ISRAEL  
Karen posing at Senior Sunrise



PHOTO: KAREN ISRAEL  
Karen decorating her car

perfect in the future as she continues to pursue her passion. “I’m hoping to make an at-home clay studio so I can throw clay, or find a studio to continue my hobby,” she said. “Art brightens up my world and connects [members of] society with one another.” Alongside seniors Yanar Moltashy and Gavin Paisley, Karen serves as co-president of the Art Club. “I wanted to be co-president so I can show that even [if] you are not good at drawing, you



PHOTO: KAREN ISRAEL  
A few of Karen’s ceramics pieces from her art class

can still be an artist,” said Karen. Gavin admires the dedication and inclusivity that Karen brings to the club. “Karen makes an excellent co-president because she is hard working and does so much behind the scenes,” said Gavin. “Her art sets her apart from others because of how she uses it to teach other people.” In addition to inspiring newer artists, Karen enjoys participating in the club and courses because she, and other members,

can come together and look at a wide variety of artwork. “We look at different artists and works to see various perspectives and different cultures, which I think is the true meaning of art,” she said. Art is defined as the expression of a human’s creative skill and imagination to create something. Karen tackles many forms of art to experience the components it takes to be a ‘artist.’ “In the Art Club, we were able to learn new skills and see people from various

groups come together to work [with one another],” said Karen. Mr. and Mrs. Israel expressed many touching words about Karen and her artistic talents. “Karen is an inspiring artist; she likes to explore different art forms and never limits herself,” said her parents. “She likes to look at life in different colors and see people in different ways. She likes to look at the world and find art in everything she sees.” Since joining the Art Club sophomore year, her parents have noticed her excitement towards practicing new skills. According to her peers and family, Karen has evolved as an artist. “[A]ll the [pieces] that she’s made in Art Club are really good, [allowing her to be] an excellent teacher, which is a huge contribution to the club,” said Gavin. While her creative quest is still unfolding, it has proved very rewarding. She has grown as an artist with her peers, exploring her creativity in Freeman and encouraging others to do the same. “We are so proud of how far Karen has come in her artistic journey,” said Mr. and Mrs. Israel. “[We] believe Freeman definitely allowed her to express her creativity while also finding that part of her she never knew she had.”

Uptown Neon Lights Up RVA

Poppy Friske  
Editor-in-Chief

From electric “open” signs announcing a restaurant’s availability to decorative designs lining bedroom walls, neon bending is a prevalent, yet somewhat unappreciated, art. In Uptown Neon, a quaint shop off of Cary Street, young business owner and artist, Chloe Kottwitz, serves as Richmond’s leading supplier of neon signage. Since taking over in the summer of 2023, Chloe has made the space her own while simultaneously paying homage to the benders that came before her — and, of course, continuing to light up the city. Chloe became enthralled with neon bending during her college years. As an art student at Alfred University in New York, she experimented with various mediums, from ceramics to printmaking. Eventually, she “... was able to take the neon class and once [she] did that, it just kind of clicked and [she] knew that’s what [she] liked the most,” said Chloe. By her senior year, she was determined to pursue neon bending as a profession and sought the help of her professor to look for commercial opportunities. Uptown Neon, owned and operated by Doug Saylon for over three decades, caught her eye. “[Doug] probably wanted someone further along in their career, but was willing to give me a shot,” said Chloe. “I came down for a week and we worked



PHOTO: NED OLIVER (AXIOUS RICHMOND)  
Uptown Neon owner, Chloe Kottwitz, in her workshop

together to see how it would go, and we hit it off.” Within a month of her meeting with Doug, Chloe moved to Richmond and began her journey as a small business owner. Cacti, Coca-Cola, and Christmas trees adorn the walls of Uptown Neon. “My favorite [signs] I have made, personally, are these glass lanterns and [a collection of] full figure, dancing girls,” said Chloe. The storefront serves as both a shop and a workspace. Customers are greeted by a cozy corner of funky signs available for purchase, the ceilings clustered with tangles of unfinished neon tubes, while vacuum pumps whirl in the background. Beyond the displays is where the real artistry occurs.

The process of creating a neon sign begins with hollow glass tubes being heated with torches. “There’s one [torch] that you can make really specific bends in ... to form soft curves ... so you heat up the glass and bend it into a pattern,” said Chloe. Next, fully-shaped units are taken to the vacuum pump, where the interiors are cleaned and prepared for the insertion of neon, which omits a red hue, or argon, responsible for a soft purple shade. By adding and adjusting different tints, benders can produce multi-colored neon signs. Once under the vacuum, the tubes are filled with gas and pulled off with a small tipping torch, awaiting a transformer power sup-

ply to give them their classic glow. Since taking over the shop less than a year ago, Chloe has worked tirelessly to ensure its continued success. She updates the new Instagram page, @uptownneonrva, regularly with seasonal signs, private workshops, and creative commissions. Local businesses, including Dominic’s Italian Grille and Conejo, flaunt their handmade neon decor. Through the creation of each piece and every advancement in the business realm, Chloe has become increasingly aware that “... it is okay not to know [everything],” she said. “[Always] be willing to ask for help.” Between juggling the technical aspects of running the shop



PHOTO: POPPY FRISKE  
Various neon signs in the shop

and creating products, Chloe looks forward to days dedicated to working through a full project. Once she’s entered “...a ‘flow state,’ [she] is less nervous with each bend,” she said. “If I get the next bend wrong, I have to restart, but once I’ve been doing it for a while, I just think, ‘Yeah, I’m going to get this.’” Now, nearly one year after assuming ownership of the shop, Chloe has become acclimated to the Richmond culture and maintained steady business. Even on the bleakest nights, locals can look to the glowing window of Uptown Neon, its vibrant creations pulsating softly into the darkness.

Willie Anne Wright Captures Southern Charm at the VMFA

Anna Meiller  
Mav Minute Editor-in-Chief

Willie Anne Wright, a nationally-respected painter and photographer, currently has her pieces displayed at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) until April 28, 2024. The exhibit, which offers free admission, contains 63 photographs and nine paintings, highlighting the different phases of Wright’s life. Beginning with her pop art paintings and moving toward layered photograms, her work showcases the depth and beauty of Southern culture. Wright, a Virginia native, was born in 1924 and has practiced art for over 60 years. “My work has been based on life experiences [and] trying things people have not done,” said Willie Anne Wright, in an interview with the VMFA. One of Wright’s specialties is the art of integrating past and present. She often uses pinhole photography, which uses a simple camera without a lens, relying on a tiny aperture. This technique allows her to achieve her method of blending history with the present. Wright didn’t begin her career in art and photography. Instead, in her early 20s, she attended

William & Mary and pursued a degree in psychology, only taking a few art classes. Later, after Wright became a wife and a mother to three, she decided to attend art school. She took night classes at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), then known as the Richmond Professional Institute in Art. Theresa Pollak, one of Wright’s teachers at VCU, was a major inspiration in Wright’s work. “She was like an old-fashioned school teacher,” said Wright. “But you respected her.” Both women utilize a variety of colors in their paintings.

“My work has been based on life experiences [and] trying things people have not done.”  
- Willie Ann Wright

Soon after Wright discovered her interest in art, she started working more in photography and developing period pieces. She began using a camera, beginning with a pinhole camera. Pinhole cameras have no lens distortion and allow everything to appear in focus. This unique camera allowed Wright to “... not believe what came



PHOTO: VMFA  
“Willie at Ruth’s Farm”

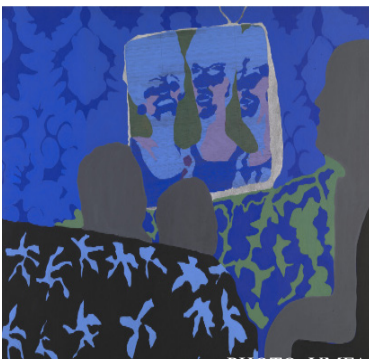


PHOTO: VMFA  
“One Night at Jimmy’s We Saw the Supremes on Color Television”

up in development,” she said. After Wright got comfortable with using her camera, she decided to try exposing her photographs directly on Cibachrome color material. Wright saw that “... color photography was coming into Vogue” and that Vogue was printing directly onto Cibachrome. When she put the mate-



PHOTO: VMFA  
“Green Supremes”

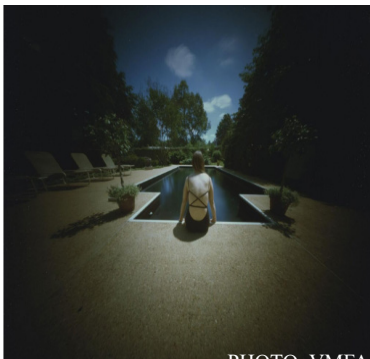


PHOTO: VMFA  
“Anne S. at Jack B’s Pool (Back)”

rial into her pinhole camera, she found that the photographs had a blue tone. After this discovery, she had “... people find filters to put over the pinhole so that it would adapt the material to a sort of natural color,” said Wright. Many of the focal points of her early photos were swimming pools, drawn to the bright

blues of the water and the brilliant summer sky that stood out in her photos. “Swimming pools were a really good subject matter and still life,” said Wright. “It was like a revelation to me.”  
- Willie Ann Wright

Wright previously showcased Civil War reenactment photos at the VMFA, where she demonstrated another style of photography. Her passion for aging photos is reflected in her reenactment photos, some of which are displayed in the current exhibit. To achieve this aged look, Wright would use her pinhole camera. By combining various photography techniques with her signature historic aesthetic, Wright curated an exhibition that tells a story through imagery. Check out her work at the VMFA before April 28, 2024, to experience one woman’s life through her creative expression.



# Oscars ‘24: Film, Fashion, and Feminism

**Ellie Grace Robinson**  
Opinions Editor

This year, the 96th Academy Awards, otherwise known as the Oscars, were held on March 10, 2024. This annual awards show highlights the year’s most popular films, as well as their casts, directors, producers, makeup artists, and more. Hosted for the second consecutive year by Jimmy Kimmel, the producer and host of “Jimmy Kimmel Live!,” the night consisted of plenty of drama, both on and off the screen.

Before the show began, a red-carpet interview show was hosted by actress Vanessa Hudgens. The nation was collectively shocked when Hudgens came down the carpet in a tight black dress, announcing her first pregnancy. What a way to kick off the evening!

In terms of outfits, many women went for the ‘defying gravity’ look, wearing dresses with sleeves that appeared to hang

in midair above or beside their shoulders. Among these fashionistas were Leah Lewis, the voice of Ember in the animated film “Elemental,” Eva Longoria, Emily Blunt, who portrayed Kitty Oppenheimer in “Oppenheimer,” Sandra Hüller, and Florence Pugh, also known as Princess Irulan in “Dune: Part Two” and Jean Tatlock in “Oppenheimer.”

There appeared to be a shift in the dynamic between the outfits of Margot Robbie and America Ferrera, the two leading actresses in Greta Gerwig’s “Barbie,” which earned a nomination for Best Picture. Robbie, who played Stereotypical Barbie, had previously been wearing pink to award shows following the film’s debut. In contrast to these bright pieces, Ferrera, who played Gloria, had been wearing black to award shows. This time, Ferrera was nominated for Best Supporting Actress, and she wore a shimmering, pink Versace gown. Meanwhile, Robbie wore a sleek black dress.

Following the red carpet interview show was the Oscars ceremony.



(From left to right) Zendaya, Emma Stone, Ariana Grande, and Lupita Nyong’o pose on the red carpet during this year’s Academy Awards

In between awards presentations, Kimmel warmed up the crowd with comical skits and banter. After all, the Academy Awards are really about entertainment more than anything else. As Kimmel pointed out, it has been

50 years since the 1974 ceremony, when a man streaked across the stage while awards were being presented. Naturally, this meant that this year, that scene was recreated as a shirtless John Cena peaked out behind a decorative column. And no, that’s not the farthest the bit went. Cena then proceeded to address the audience fully in the nude, with only an envelope to cover up. Oh, and Birkenstocks!

Ryan Gosling donned a pink, bejeweled suit to perform the Best-Music-nominated song, “I’m Just Ken,” surrounded by backup dancers (his fellow Kens), and was, at one point, accompanied by guitarist, Slash. “Barbie” dominated the musical category, with “What Was I Made For?,” sung by Billie Eilish and FINNEAS, winning Best Original Song. The duo performed the song live and received a standing ovation.

In terms of awards, “Oppenheimer” took home the most hardware — a grand total of seven Oscars! The film won Best Picture, Best Original Score, Best Cinematography, Best Film Editing,

and Best Director (Christopher Nolan). Leading man Cillian Murphy (J. Robert Oppenheimer) won Best Actor, and his co-star, Robert Downey Jr. (Lewis Strauss), won Best Supporting Actor.

“Oppenheimer” wasn’t the only film that dominated the night. Another frequent winner was “Poor Things,” which won Best Costume Design, Best Makeup and Hairstyling, and Best Production Design. Emma Stone, the film’s lead, received her second career award for Best Actress for her performance as Bella Baxter.

Social media and Freeman students were raving about Emma Stone’s acceptance speech following the awards. In it, she said, “It’s not about me, it’s about a team that came together to make something greater than the sum of its parts, and that is the best part about making movies.” She went on to express that she was honored to share the award with “... every single person who poured their love and their care and their brilliance into the making of this film.”



Ryan Gosling during his “I’m Just Ken” performance at the Oscars

# Richmond Shakespeare Festival Returns to Agecroft Hall

**Katie Hall**  
Editor-in-Chief

This summer, the Richmond Shakespeare Festival will return to the historic Agecroft Hall and Gardens with two productions: “Much Ado About Nothing,” directed by Shanea N. Taylor, and “Doctor Faustus,” directed by James Ricks.

Agecroft Hall, a Tudor mansion nestled next to the James River in the City of Richmond, sets the stage for the festival season. The mansion acts as a historically accurate backdrop, transporting audiences back in time to the Elizabethan era. “The Agecroft venue is the perfect place to stage outdoor theatre, as its location is simply stunning ... [the] building stood in England during Shakespeare’s lifetime,” said James Ricks, the artistic director for Richmond Shakespeare. “It ignites the imagination of our artists and our audiences.”

The festival this summer will kick off with one of Shakespeare’s classic comedies, “Much Ado About Nothing.” The play

primarily centers around witty banter between the story’s protagonists, Beatrice and Benedick. According to Mr. Ricks, this show is an especially popular production with Richmond audiences. With a scheduled run from May 23 through June 23, 2024, the company will reintroduce the play to the Agecroft venue for the first time since its last rendition in the festival nine years ago.

Despite their company name, Richmond Shakespeare’s productions include far more than just the Shakespearean repertoire. They typically incorporate a variety of works from different centuries and authors, including plays by “Moliere, Oliver Goldsmith and even David Ives,” said Mr. Ricks.

In the upcoming season, Richmond Shakespeare will present a play penned by English playwright Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe’s “Doctor Faustus,” an Elizabethan-era tragedy, will be their second summer show with performances from July 4 - 21, 2024.

A stark contrast to Shakespeare’s humorous “Much Ado About Nothing,” “Doctor Faustus” is

“a cautionary tale, but it is a ton of fun that’s full of angels, devils, [and] the seven deadly sins,” said Mr. Ricks. “A man sells his soul to the devil for absolute knowledge of all the secrets of the known universe.” The story focuses on darker themes including morality and repentance.

During their performances, the company intertwines emotion and spoken language through Elizabethan-style literature. “With Shakespeare, when people ... want to communicate some-

“With Shakespeare, when people ... want to communicate something with power and beauty, they use this heightened language, and that is really what early theater was about.”

- Mr. Ricks



GRAPHIC: AVA FLOURNOY



PHOTO: AGECROFT HALL

Richmond Shakespeare performance at Agecroft Hall

thing with power and beauty, they use this heightened language, and that is really what early theater was about,” said Mr. Ricks. “It reminds us that when we

“There is nothing quite like live theater, especially in a magnificent outdoor setting like Agecroft Hall.”

- Mr. Ricks

are in states of sublime ecstasy, the heart wants to wax poetic. When we feel elevated by emotion, it comes out in the form of very carefully chosen language.” To emphasize the gravity of

Shakespeare’s words, Richmond Shakespeare’s productions connect modern artistic elements with classic Elizabethan characters. The summer festival illustrates the evolution of human expression by emphasizing the contrast between current styles of communication and the language employed in Shakespeare’s “First Folio.” “Today, there are thousands of platforms for entertainment and almost every single one is visually dominant. Language takes a back seat,” said Mr. Ricks.

Mr. Ricks encouraged readers to embrace live arts and linguistics with a visit to the 2024 Richmond Shakespeare Festival. “[Come] out to see a show. Bring a friend! There is nothing quite like live theater, especially in a magnificent outdoor setting like Agecroft Hall,” he said.



## Work, Technology, and Mental Health



PHOTO: CNBC

Senator Bernie Sanders

Senator Bernie Sanders has re-introduced the idea of a 32-hour work week. The proposed Protected Time Off Act would guarantee full-time workers no less than two weeks of paid leave annually. With a phased introduction, these work time reductions with the hope of lowering stress levels and increasing productivity while revenues fluctuate, according to AP News.



PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pro-TikTok protestors

On March 13, 2024, the United States House of Representatives passed a bill to compel TikTok owner, ByteDance, to sell the app or have it fully banned in the U.S. Lawmakers expressed concerns about U.S. national security, believing the app could be collecting users' sensitive data. ByteDance now has a narrow window to sell Tiktok before the U.S. takes action.

Content by Merrick Mock and Lizzie Herod

# Gang Violence Surges in Port-au-Prince

Ella Post

Online Editor-in-Chief

Gang violence in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, has been occurring since 2020. According to the International Organization for Migration, the ongoing warfare has displaced over 360,000 people, with its current situation consuming a large portion of the capital.

According to the United Nations (U.N.), deaths and kidnaps have more than doubled since last year. Around 300 gangs control 80 percent of Port-au-Prince as of March 24, 2024. These same gangs were responsible for 83 percent of last year's injury and death rate statistics. They have traveled north into the Artibonite region, also known as Haiti's food basket, to block off food supplies. South of the capital, they are conducting more devastating attacks, often using sexual assault to gain control.

On March 18, 2024, Haiti's "safe" part of town, Petion-Ville, was attacked by these groups. A dozen civilians were shot during this attack, which also included the defamation of a judge's home to express a clear message to the government that the gangs will keep fighting for power.

Essentials in Haiti are getting harder and harder to obtain. The gang's control of main roads has blocked off the transportation of vital imported food and fuel across Haiti. Highly inflated prices are needed to safely transport goods. An article from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) wrote, "Dr. Mardoche Clervil, the hospital's obstetrician, ... said that the gangs' control of the roads in and out of Port-au-Prince was making it tough to find enough fuel to keep the lights on, or the ceiling fans whirring." Prices are increasing far too



PHOTO: USA TODAY

A man drives past burning tires in Port-au-Prince.

quickly for a country where over 60 percent of citizens make less than \$4 a day, according to World Bank estimates. The U.N. stated that 45 percent of the country needs food and aid to survive. A market vendor in Jérémie told a reporter that the wholesale price for a sack of sugar has increased from the equivalent of \$50 to \$150. One bag of rice, a staple in Haitian cuisine, has climbed from \$40 to \$120. Due to inter-gang disputes and extremely low incomes, 300,000 people have lost their homes and are now living on the crime-filled streets.

In addition to the riots and attacks, the gangs are turning kidnapping into a form of corporate business. According to a CNN news report, at least 2,490 people in 2023 were kidnapped off the streets and their families were ordered to pay a ransom for their freedom. The victims whose families could not pay for their release were often executed, adding to the thousands of others who have lost their lives to indiscriminate gunfire, waves of arson, and other abuses. Through

these ransoms, the gangs have gained mass amounts of revenue to use for new weaponry.

Unstable leadership from Haiti's prime minister, Ariel Henry, has also contributed to the mass amounts of gang violence. In 2021, after the assassination of Jovenel Moïse, Henry came into power with the support of many world leaders, including Canada and the United States. He promised to restore order and hold elections but has failed to keep this promise. The last elections held in Haiti occurred in 2016. Most terms have expired, resulting in vacancies in many important offices, including the presidency and the entire legislature. On March 12, 2024, Henry announced that he would resign once a transitional presidential council was created, according to AP News.

The lack of stable political leadership has angered the citizens of Haiti, who are now calling for a revolution against the government. As hatred grows, more people join in on the violence and fighting. A revolt on March 3, 2024, turned into one of the most dan-

gerous after civilians aided in the breakdown of the National Penitentiary and the escape of over 3700 prisoners. "We are done. No one will be spared in the capital," said a Haitian police union.

Henry and other Haitian government officials have asked for support from other world leaders in the U.N. In Feb. 2024, Henry signed an agreement with President William Ruto of Kenya to send troops to Haiti. No text of the agreement was released, nor did reports state when the troops would be deployed. While Henry was gone, new coordinated attacks, intended to overthrow the government, occurred. Institutions such as government offices, schools, and businesses were forced to close. Police units in Haiti are unable to stop these attacks. Along with Kenya, the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Chad, and Benin have promised to deploy troops to Haiti, U.N. spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, told reporters on March 1, 2024. The U.N. trust fund has about \$11 million dedicated to Haiti and another \$78 million is expected soon.

## Boeing Airplanes: A Terminal Case?

Celia Acey

Sports Editor

Airline manufacturer, Boeing, has been in the public eye following multiple incidents of mechanical malfunctions in their planes.

The events began in Jan. 2024, on Alaska Airlines Flight 1282, when a Boeing 737 Max 9 was taking off from Oregon. Just a few minutes into the flight, the rear door was expelled from the plane. Despite the missing door, all passengers remained unharmed, with no serious injuries.

Following the incident, both Alaska and United Airlines grounded over 100 Boeing 737 Max 9 aircrafts, while the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordered a shutdown of 171 Boeing 737 Max 9 planes.

However, on Jan. 8, 2024, it was announced that both airlines had found loose parts on the grounded 737 jets. The inspec-

tions "found instances that appear to relate to installation issues in the door plug — for example, bolts that needed additional tightening," said a United representative.

Boeing President and CEO, Dave Calhoun, responded with a statement following the report release. "Whatever final conclusions are reached, Boeing is accountable for what happened," said Calhoun. Just a few weeks later, the majority of the Boeing 737 Max 9 jets were placed back in service by the FAA.

On Feb. 6, 2024, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) announced in a preliminary report that four bolts were missing from the Boeing 737 Max 9 flying the Alaska Airlines Flight 1282. Back in Sept. 2023, workers were tasked with replacing rivets in the door and the plane was put back in the air.

Following the release, the FAA gave Boeing 90 days to figure out their systemic quality-control issues to meet the federal safety standards. "Boeing must commit

to real and profound improvements," said FAA administrator Mike Whitaker. "Boeing must take a fresh look at every aspect of their quality-control process and ensure that safety is the company's guiding principle."

Despite the lengthy exchange between the federal agencies and Boeing, many key documents have yet to be submitted by Boeing. The company's Executive Vice President of Government Operations has denied accusations of being uncooperative. They simply said they cannot find any documents on the "opening and closing of the door plug" despite looking "extensively."

On March 9, 2024, John Barnett, a former Boeing quality control manager who became a whistleblower, was found dead from what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Working for Boeing for over a decade, Barnett had previously raised serious concerns about the company's production standards.



PHOTO: CNN

Boeing 737 plane

Following his death, suspicions arose about the circumstances surrounding the incident. "We didn't see any indication he would take his own life," said the Barnett family lawyers. "We need

more information about what happened to John. The Charleston police need to investigate this fully and accurately and tell the public what they find out. No detail can be left untuned."

## Youth Doom and Gloom Hinders U.S. in Global Happiness Ranking



PHOTO: SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

A therapy session in progress with a teenage patient

Afton Hessian

News and World News Editor

In the 2024 World Happiness Report, the United States (U.S.) fell to 23rd, eight places below its 2023 position of 15th. This marks the first time since 2012 that the U.S. did not make the Top 20. Nordic countries outperformed other regions of the world, with Finland ranking first for the seventh consecutive year. The World Happiness Report polls around 1,000 individu-

als from each country on a scale of 1 to 10 to measure their life satisfaction. They employ six variables including GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and corruption to understand the life evaluations.

The report found disparities between the well-being of younger and older generations. Americans under the age of 30 ranked 62nd out of 143 countries for happiness, while adults aged 60 and above ranked 10th. Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, director of the University of Oxford's

Wellbeing Research Center and an editor of the report, said in previous years the "youth start higher, then they drop in well-being virtually all the way down to a midlife crisis, which is typically the late 30s, early 40s." This U-curve model was not present in this year's report, with the youth starting low and gradually getting higher as the ages progressed.

De Neve found these results to be "very disconcerting because essentially it means that they're at the level of their midlife crisis today and obviously begs the question of what's next for them," he said. He cited hyperpolarization, growing health and income disparities, and social media use as possible causes of the drop.

Many of the countries with the biggest improvement in rank were from Central and Eastern Europe, including Slovenia, Czechia, and Lithuania. Unlike the U.S., these improvements were driven by the youth, whose happiness outperforms that of older generations in these nations.

## Niger Cuts Off Military Agreement with the U.S.

Maggie Jacoby

Features Editor

Following a visit by American diplomatic and military officials, Niger has suspended its years-long military agreement with the United States (U.S.). According to military spokesman Colonel Amadou Abdramane, the end to this agreement has gone into "immediate effect."

The previous pact between America and Niger, referred to as the "Status of Forces" Agreement, was signed in 2012. This pact stated that the U.S. military and civilian defense staff could operate on Niger's soil.

Niger has been a regional partner for the U.S., with hundreds of military personnel stationed at Airbase 201, in the city of Agadez. This airbase deployed flights over Africa's Sahel region, where jihadi groups would operate. The Niger base was also used for surveillance operations. However,

since the military junta rose to power, in what the U.S. formally announced as a coup, relations with have rapidly declined.

Niger's decision to cut off all military operations with the United States was announced after senior U.S. officials visited Niger. The U.S. officials conferred about their growing concerns regarding Niger's escalating relations with both Russia and Iran.

The Nigerien military claimed that the U.S. delegation did not follow diplomatic protocol. They explained that Niger was not informed about who comprised the delegation nor that it was coming in the first place.

Niger is thought of as one of few countries in the region that Western nations could partner with to contain the growing number of jihadists groups. The State Department posted on X, stating that, as of the time of posting, it was unclear whether the U.S. had any chance of rekindling their deal to stay inside the country.