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COVER IMAGE:

Photo illustration by Doug Dobey

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On the Inside Looking Out Imprisoned During a Pandemic

by CHAD HENSLEY

IN PRISON, CHANGE OF any kind—good or bad—is unwelcome. It’s important to keep all activities and procedures on a strict schedule. To do otherwise leads to confusion, which can make inmates restless.

Routine allows time to pass by quickly, making a sentence easier to serve. When routines are disrupted, prisoners can become rowdy, at times even violent. Fortunately, State Farm Correctional Center in Powhatan County has done an adequate job of maintaining routine despite a disruption in routine caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I speak from experience, having just been released from the Virginia penal system after serving a 71-month sentence.

Not long after the State Farm went on lockdown mode, anxieties rose rapidly. There were so many unknowns about this novel coronavirus. Will it reach us, and if so, when?

Health and sanitation became top priorities for everyone. Some of my fellow inmates let other offenders know in no uncertain terms that the bathroom in our pod be kept immaculate at all times. I’d heard threats made, although not towards anyone in particular. If someone was caught making a mess in the bathroom and not cleaning it up immediately, they would be dealt with in the harshest manner conceivable. Although these ultimatums were made, no one ever acted on them.

The staff had given us appropriate tools to keep our pods clean. Each unit was issued a bucket of disinfectant along with clean rags so we could wipe down surfaces every day. I used a clean sock over the phone whenever I made a call to ensure my safety and the safety of others.

Immediately after lockdown, we were given “sneeze guards”—bright orange polyester face masks with a single strap. These “guards” prevented the airborne virus from passing through the fabric and were preferred by inmates because they could be worn



around the neck when not in use. Later, we were given PPE masks secured around the ears. These masks worked fine, but were worn less frequently than the sneeze guards.

We were required to wear these masks whenever we were outside the “bunk area”, which is where we slept. In the “day room”—common areas that contain phones, the main TV, a pool table and the bathroom—we had to wear masks at all times.

This seemed somewhat counterproductive to me because there is absolutely no physical barrier whatsoever between these two areas,

Unit staff rarely enforced this rule. When we left the building, however, wearing a face mask at all times was compulsory. We were only permitted to leave the building when we went to commissary or to medical. Kitchen and yard workers left the unit almost every day. We were not required to wear masks in the rear recreation yard, although we had to do so when in the main yard.

The staff was required to wear masks at all times. They were, after all, out in the world at large and had the potential of infecting us with this rapidly spreading virus. They wore a range of masks from the N-95s recommended by the CDC and NIH, to simple bandanas.

Despite these precautions, a few months ago the virus struck our facility, infecting five inmates, two in one building, three in another. None of those infected was in my pod. The five men who tested positive for the novel coronavirus were quarantined in a building that had been prepared for this eventuality.

I have not heard more about these men since, but assume they are healthy now. We learned of the outbreak during a visit from National Guardsmen who tested us with nasal swabs. I took the opportunity to thank them for their service.

It is not lost on me how lucky we were that they arrived in time to detect the infection before it spread. Having

heard about other Virginia prisons where there were deaths makes me very grateful that we were spared.

But that could change at any time, which is why vigilant testing and contact tracing, along with adhering to CDC protocols is an absolute must.

There are high-risk men imprisoned in Virginia. Some of them are my friends and they know they are particularly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.

“I ain’t trying to catch this s**t and die,” a 76-year old incarcerated friend told me. “I’m about to get out. I’ve been through enough not to get killed by something I can’t fight.”

He isn’t the only one. A close friend of mine, fortunately recently released, is battling bone cancer. While serving time at the State Farm, he was extremely anxious about contracting the virus. At the time, he was receiving chemotherapy, which compromised his immune system.

Another friend of mine has only one

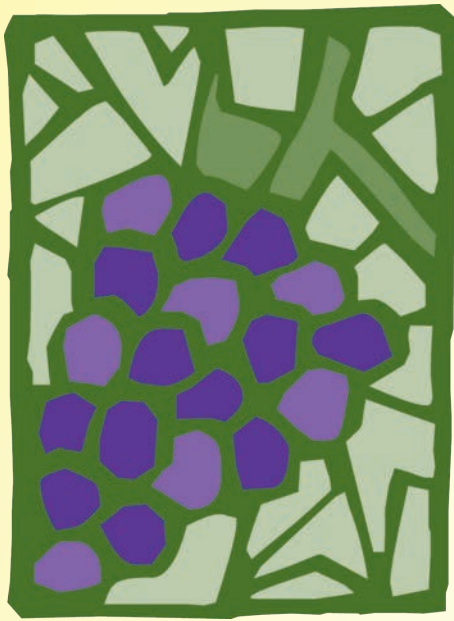
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lung. Before the pandemic struck he complained about people burning things in the microwave, which would leave a charred smell in the air. As far as he knows his immune system is not compromised, but how he'd handle Covid-19 weighed heavily on his mind. "There's only one way to find out," he told me.

My own paranoia would get the better of me at times. I shuddered with anxiety whenever I heard somebody coughing repeatedly at night. I always told myself that worrying never helps anything, but it's a hard feeling to fight.

Many of us imprisoned at the State Farm were more concerned about the health of our families on the outside than we were about ours. The majority of men incarcerated with me were fathers, some with children.

"My family visits each other a lot," one father said. "One kid will hang with my parents and might give it to them, then my parents will give it to the next kid who visits, and so on. I'm very worried. I get out in twenty days. I hope they don't get infected. It's tough getting on the phone to talk to them. Sometimes I worry that I'm going to have to fight someone in order to get a spot on the phone so I can talk to my family."

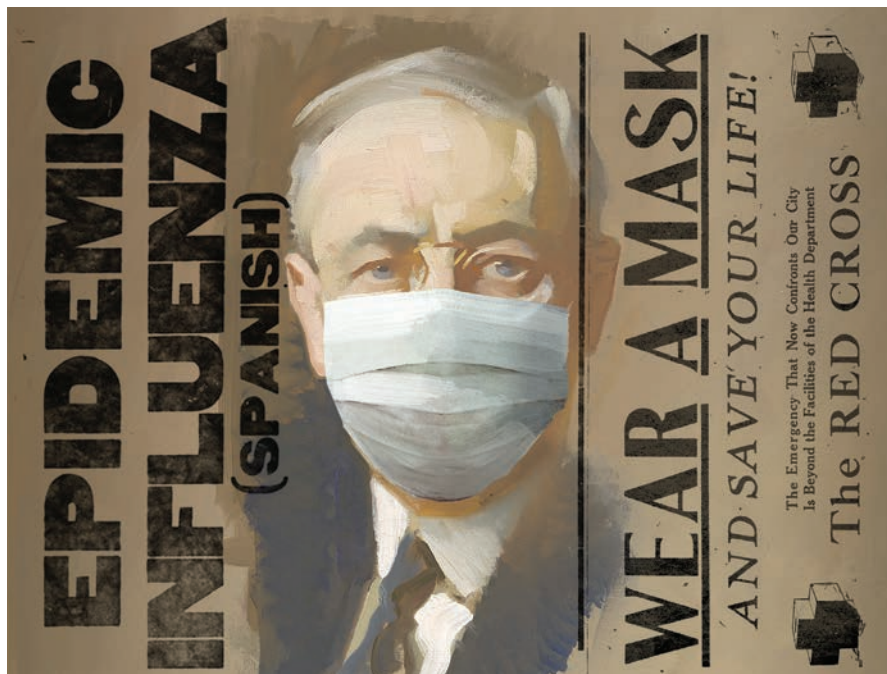
Whenever I called my own family, I braced myself for the news that someone had been infected. I have three grandparents in their eighties, and two parents in their fifties, both of whom smoke. I always reminded them to stay safe whenever they go out by wearing a mask and social distancing. Fortunately, they were all following the protocols recommended by CDC.

For the most part, inmates keep their personal anxieties private. To the casual observer, things may seem normal at the State Farm. Gripes of bad food, petty staff, and irksome offenders were pervasive, but that's to be expected. Even when the BLM protests erupted this past summer, opinions were kept close to the chest. No conflict regarding political beliefs ever arose, which was the case even before the pandemic and protests. But beneath that surface of calm, there were deep currents of fear and anxiety over COVID-19.

I think often about inmates still incarcerated, and I can keenly feel the anxiety that hovers over them day in and day out. Can feel it as if I were still on the inside looking out. **NJ**

Presidential Lies In the Time of Pandemics

by JACK R JOHNSON



PRESIDENT TRUMP IS certainly not the first commander in chief to try to hide a physical ailment from the nation. FDR suffered from polio and was actually paraplegic, but was able to hide his condition with the assistance of aides and the press. Kennedy suffered from chronic back pain and Addison's disease. Eisenhower had Crohn's disease and a minor stroke. Reagan likely was in the throes of Alzheimer's during his final term in office. But perhaps the most consequential presidential illness was that suffered by Woodrow Wilson in 1919 at the height of the Treaty of Versailles negotiations.

In full vigor, Wilson arrived in Paris with a plan to implement his Fourteen Points and provide for a lasting world peace. At the same time, the Spanish flu was ravaging the world. Wilson paid little attention to this other global threat. Historian John M. Barry, author of *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*, writes, "There was no leadership or guidance of any kind directly from the White House. Wilson wanted the focus to remain on the war effort. Anything negative was viewed as hurting morale and hurting the war effort."

Like the Trump administration, Wilson's White House, and federal and

local health leaders downplayed the severity of the virus from the beginning. One Camp Dix health official said, "they have the epidemic under control", even as the death toll was pushing 400,000 (eventually 675,000 Americans would die from the Spanish flu). Colonel Philip Doane, the head of Health and Sanitation Section of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, which was charged with building a fleet of merchant ships, said this strain of flu was "nothing more or less than old-fashioned grippe."

It wasn't as if they didn't know of soldiers falling ill from this deadly flu virus. Despite this knowledge, Wilson continued active troop mobilizations "even as World War I was winding to a close," thus contributing to the global spread of the disease. There were reports of illness striking young, healthy soldiers in military barracks and on troop transport ships.

And, of course, it wasn't just the troops. Like today's Covid-19, the Spanish flu was highly infectious and spread through the air. White House staffers started to come down with the contagious virus as well, including a Secret Service agent, the White House usher, and a stenographer.

Up until the Paris peace talks began, Wilson remained largely unaffected, but a young American aide in the peace delegation—25-year old Donald Fra-

ry—became ill with the flu and died.

Then Wilson caught the flu. He was struck with a 103 degree fever and spasms of coughing convulsions. He also exhibited severe disorientation; at one point becoming convince he was surrounded by French spies.


Wilson came down with the flu at a critical juncture of the negotiations. He was struggling to coax the allies into softening the terms of the treaty so that Germany would not be burdened for years with an unpayable debt.

According to Steve Coll, writing in *The New Yorker*, the president had originally argued that the Allies "should go easy" on Germany to facilitate the success of his pet project, the League of Nations. But French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, whose country had endured much devastation during the four-year conflict, wanted to take a tougher stance; days after coming down with the flu, an exhausted Wilson conceded to the other world leaders' demands, setting the stage for what Coll describes as "a settlement so harsh and onerous to Germans that it became a provocative cause of revived German nationalism ... and, eventually, a rallying cause of Adolf Hitler."

Weakened from the flu and probably not fully stable, Wilson abdicated on all but his last point for peace, his League of Nations. He hoped to push this through congress once he was stateside.

Back in the United States, about six months after he had come down with the flu, Wilson embarked on a 27-day train journey to sell the treaty to live audiences; he cut the tour short due to exhaustion and sickness. Back in D.C., Wilson suffered a debilitating stroke that left him paralyzed on his left side and partially blind. His wife, Edith Wilson, hid this last medical fact from the press, as well, and tried to 'steward' his presidency, herself. (The 25th amendment, which outlines the procedure for an incapacitated President would not be ratified until 1967.)

Thanks largely to Republican resistance, Congress never passed the League of Nations. And twenty short years after the Treaty of Versailles was negotiated with its onerous debt penalty, Germany invaded Poland, beginning World War II.

Instead of disclosing her husband's stroke, First Lady Edith Wilson hid his life-threatening condition from politicians, the press and the public, embarking on a self-described "stewardship" that Howard Markel of PBS Newshour more accurately defines as a secret presidency. 



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Alexsis Rodgers and Kim Gray In Richmond Mayoral Race

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

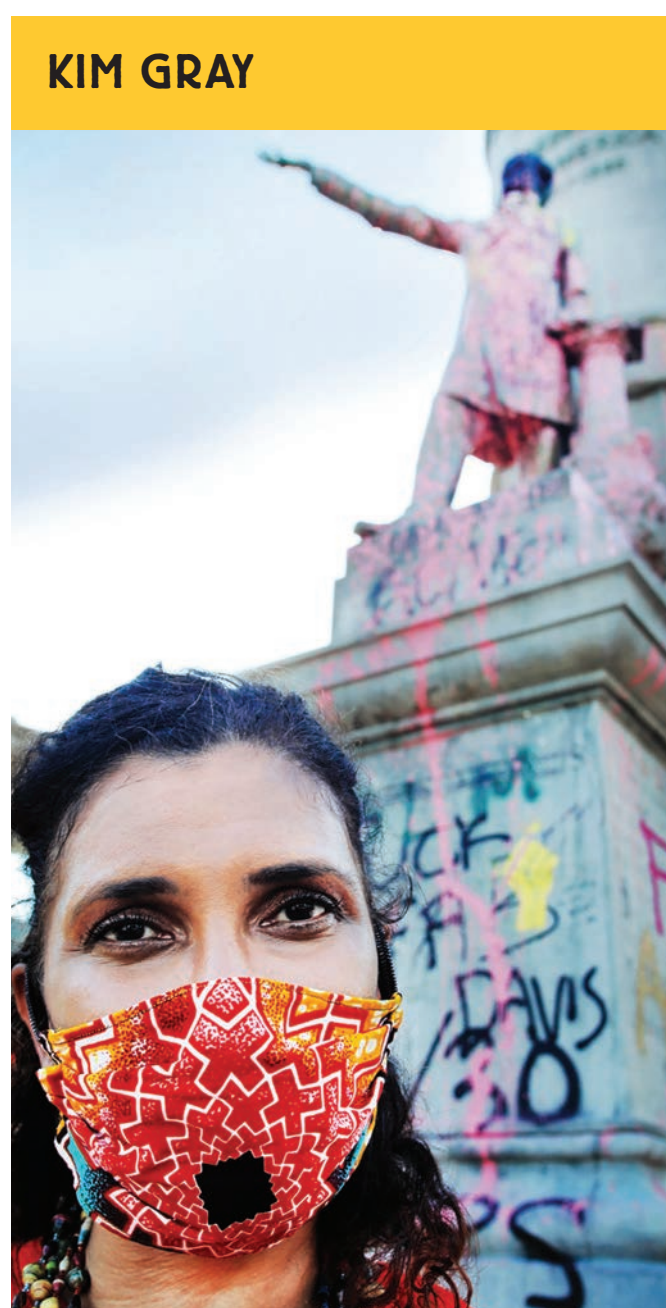
FROM THE MOMENT Richmond mayoral candidates burst from the gate, there were two notable front runners. Both are Black, both are women, both were born and raised in the Richmond area. This, too: both of them are critical of the incumbent mayor's leadership.

Kim Gray is a seasoned politician with an insider's understanding of the machineries that run Richmond, or bring it to a grinding halt. She has served as 2nd District Councilor for the past four years, and has spent much of her adult life working on local boards, and for non-profit and civic organizations. To date, Kim has raised more than \$320,000, second only to Mayor Levar Stoney.

Alexsis Rodgers worked as a policy director under then-Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam. She then went to work for Planned Parenthood, and is currently state director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance, which this year succeeded in "winning protections for nannies, cleaners and homecare workers." Alexis announced her candidacy at the eleventh hour, and within a week her war chest grew to over \$55,000 from more than 700 contributors. She has now raised about \$315,000.

This past summer, in the wake of the sadistic murder of George Floyd as Black Lives Matter protests rose to a deafening crescendo, I interviewed each of these women near monuments that had become flashpoints for demonstrations. Kim Gray met me at Allen and Monument avenues in the shadow of the last monument standing there. Alexis and I talked at one of her favorite sites in Richmond—Libby Hill Park—just yards away from "the pencil", the tall pedestal that once supported a statue of an anonymous Confederate soldier, which was removed this past July.

On June 1, a month after protests erupted across the country, peaceful demonstrators gathered around the rotary and greensward surrounding the Lee Monument, which had be-



KIM GRAY

come a focal point for BLM protests. It was nearly a half hour before an eight o'clock curfew imposed by Mayor Stoney. What would happen next seemed surreal and dystopian.

Two armored vehicles arrived and deployed police officers some of whom were armed with assault rifles and side arms. There was no provocation or warning. Police fired canisters of tear gas into the crowd, and doused others with pepper spray. Mayhem ensued.

Here's what each of the candidates had to say about that event.

KIM GRAY

"I was subjected to teargas out on Broad Street, and I know what it feels like. Definitely someone made a big mistake in releasing that teargas. I think that this is evidence of major systemic problems within our city government and how things are run and I think it comes back to leadership at every turn."

ALEXSIS RODGERS

"The first week in June was incredibly frustrating and scary for a lot of us. I woke up on June 1 and one of my friends had gone missing and as



ALEXSIS RODGERS

we later found she went out to protest and didn't come back because she had been arrested. She was one of the 233 people who had been arrested, who were zip-tied, left on a bus overnight at the jail, no food, no water, never mind that it's the pandemic and that they're in close proximity with other people.

"I marched down to City Hall on June 3 to hear the mayor's apology, and I was hopeful that we would get more than an apology, but we didn't and in fact we got, 'I'm sorry, I can't help you, I'm not in charge of investigating the police. I can't do what you're asking for. You have to call someone else's office.'

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“To me as the mayor of the city, the buck stops with you. And you need to be able to stand up in moments of crisis and say unequivocally what’s right and wrong, and what you’re going to do within your platform to make the change. I’m not naïve. I know there are certain things that you need to call on someone else’s department or agency head to do, but he didn’t do that. And that was unacceptable.”

Both candidates see a failure of the city’s current administration in something as simple and straightforward as the granting of permits.

ALEXIS RODGERS

“This was definitely something I’ve heard of in casual conversations with other folks whether it’s trying to do an addition on the house, or open a business, etcetera. Permits matter. They can hold up health care projects. I think what we have seen is that the mayor has been really focused on some of the shiny projects and the things that get him in the news and headlines. I’m not gonna say that I wouldn’t want to do a ribbon-cutting either, but I’ve got to make sure we’re handling the permits, and the things that make the city run on a day-to-day basis.”

KIM GRAY

“Several of the businesses damaged during the protests in Jackson Ward are having to rebuild. But they aren’t able to fast track or get their permits. There are so many people who are out of work and need social services, and they’re not able to get the services they need. There’s so much brokenness in our city government and I think that’s key to remain focused on. The people are protesting because they aren’t getting what they require from our city, state and federal government.”

Alexis and Kim agree that non-violent protesters are simply exercising their constitutional rights, and attempting to silence them is a dangerous and unpatriotic tactic.

KIM GRAY

“I am all about social activism and making sure we are holding our government accountable to us. It is our government. Peaceful protests are always welcomed. I’ve participated in protesting over the years multiple times. I’ve gone to the White House; I’ve gone to the Mall in DC with the women’s march, with the Million Black Man March. I’ve been a protester.”

ALEXIS RODGERS

“I think a lot of people have said, ‘Oh



ALEXIS RODGERS

well these concerns, these are just young people out here making noise, but honestly I talked to many folks that are my grandparents age who remember themselves putting their bodies on the line for their Civil Rights moment and I think a lot of folks who are older maybe they’re not in the streets right now because they don’t think it’s safe, but they relate to the movement that’s currently happening because they’ve seen it in their own generation.

“I would say that not just federal folks have been intentionally following and trying to silence protesters. We’ve seen the same kind of tactics when it comes to state police and local officers intentionally trying to identify who are the organizers of the protests and using them as literally a political football to try and squash the movement overall. And again these are protesters exercising their First Amendment right and it is unjust and completely wrong that any city employee, whether they’re an officer or otherwise, to say that your protest is not valid, is not welcome. And it’s scary actually, and an assault on our civil rights to see some of the tactics that the police specifically have been using to discriminate and target protesters.”

Both candidates are also opposed to the destruction of private property and other violent actions. Kim Gray, who lives in Jackson Ward, has witnessed both destruction of private property and intimidation.

ALEXIS RODGERS

“I certainly don’t condone any form of violence against people or property. I think there are certainly going to be efforts to undermine our movement. This is not something new. I had the pleasure of working with Alicia Garza who is one of the co-founders of Black Lives Matter. They saw this after Fer-



KIM GRAY

gusson. They’ve seen this generally in response to any concerted effort of Black Lives Matter for other insurgent organizations or groups to try to undermine it with distraction or misinformation. So this is not new. So we should expect to see it in Richmond. But for me, I’m focused on making sure that folks are laser-focused on the demands that we’ve put forward related to the Marcus Alert, civilian review board, police accountability and transparency and data.”

KIM GRAY

“I’m at ground zero near Abner Clay Park. I’ve had very, very scary moments as a mother. My youngest son who is twelve was in the house when all this stuff was happening downtown. There were plumes of teargas in the neighborhood and smoke coming into the windows. I’ve had him isolated because he’s very fragile because he has asthma.

“And to have many fires set in our neighborhood—car fires, and dumpster fires, and sofas being set on fire. There are folks setting super cans on fire and pushing them up against the properties. It is violence inflicted on my neighbors, many of them struggling as it is, especially with the COVID-19 shutdowns. To come out and have a windshield smashed to pieces and not being able to get to work. I’ve had grown men calling me, crying, because they’re just getting back to work and now this. It’s been a real struggle these past few weeks.

“Waller Jewelers has been around for 120 years. They started off in the same neighborhood where my grandfather lived a hundred years ago. And they’re part of our fabric and our history. Dr. Randy Adams has served our community and our children as a dentist for over thirty years. He specializes in

seeing children with disabilities and special needs. He’s a needed resource for our children and our community and his place was hit along with Waller’s. There was an attempt to burn the Hippodrome and the 2C apartments. Those two buildings are an important part of our Jackson Ward history, Black Wall Street, the Harlem of the South. We’ve been out there fighting people off because if you’re really about Black lives and supporting Black people, don’t set fires in my historically Black neighborhood and tear up Black businesses.

“No businesses should be subjected to vandalism, fires, any of the things that are happening because we depend upon those investors, those people who come into our community. We depend upon them. The Rite Aid Pharmacy serves all of the community around here. The Wells Fargo is the bank that many of my neighbors use, and many of them are elderly and can’t get around. Our bus service was shut down. There are so many people who could not get to work because a bus was set afire, and it was not safe to ride buses. So I absolutely oppose violence on every level. I oppose vandalism and burning out of our buildings down here.”

There is no denying that systemic racism exists in this country and in our city. The question remains: how do you change it?

KIM GRAY

“I grew up within a mile and a half of the monuments, which were disturbing reminders, but I look toward the positive and I don’t focus in on the negative. Growing up when I did as a biracial child in the city, we were traumatized, we had a lot of negative actions and things done to us that shouldn’t have happened to children. I’ve always taken the course of trying to bring people together. It’s been what I’ve done from birth. I try to force a dialogue to move things in a way that we’re not just changing physical aspects of our environment but we’re changing peoples’ hearts.”

ALEXIS RODGERS

“A lot of these demands we’re calling for today people have been called for for years, if not decades. The Richmond NAACP has been calling for a civilian review board for literally decades, and we haven’t had the leadership we need in City Hall to address these concerns seriously. So, for me, number one we’re going to be proactively listening and trying to address

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ELECTION

these real legitimate concerns from the community before it gets to a moment of crisis like we've seen in June and July. And certainly when there are incidents of crisis, let's be honest about what we can do.

"Richmond has been calling for a lot of these changes for a long time but there's a new sense of urgency here in the city and nationally that Black Lives Matter. We're not going to settle for police violence against Black folks any longer and if you're not with it, you're out of here. And that's why I stepped up to run.

"First we have to reinvest in services that are going to fund black futures. And that explicitly is because policing has historically had a disproportionate negative impact on black and brown people. So when it comes to reinvesting though, I think we can have really intentional and authentic conversations with the community about how we keep ourselves safe and what would make us safer, whether that's work force training, education, mental health services."

There are also calls to reform police departments across the country.

ALEXIS RODGERS

"Specifically, equity when it comes to policing and public safety, we need to reduce the scope and scale of policing. And that means not sending officers into situations that they're not prepared to address. There are great models all across this country. Where at the dispatch level, they're deciding, 'Hey, this response is actually for a mental health professional. This response should be for medical services.' Right now in the city if you call 911 and you don't tell them specifically that you didn't need a law enforcement response, you'll end up there with an officer and maybe it was just a homeless person that needed to get into a cooling shelter, but that doesn't require a law enforcement response.

"We definitely need better training and continued learning for police officers. We need better training, holistic training, about not just criminal response, but sensitive and informed response to diverse communities, immigrant populations, LGBTQ folk, making sure that officers are competent when it comes to these very diverse communities and can respond in a way that makes sense.

"When I'm talking about defunding police, it's all about taking that money and reinvesting it into black futures. Whether you call it reparations or investments in black futures, for me it's about making sure that communities that historically have been the most

harmed by an unjust system are getting the benefits as we move forward."

KIM GRAY

"I always want to balance what I'm doing and what I'm saying with public safety and protection of our people. It's a delicate balance. I think a lot of what we're seeing right now with the tear-gassing and the violence that's happening in our communities and the vandalism is a result of not striking that balance very well, and not taking action against aggressive officers. There are many, many more well-behaved officers than there are aggressive ones, but it doesn't matter when you're the one encountering that bad one. It means nothing to know that there are really good ones out there.

"It's really tough and I hear a lot of talk about defunding the police, but I've been down here calling for the police and fire for their assistance when things are happening and I know in those moments when you're on your own and you don't feel like anybody's going to come to your rescue, it's a very scary thing. And I think we need to take a breath and have a longer conversation about what our policing looks like, and to take a breath and see what happens, but when children are getting injured in fires as a result of not being able to get firetrucks through, or management decisions to not send fire crews in because a lot of these fires when I was calling for assistance to get these fires out.

"Two young police officers were shot on South Side. They got a call about someone with a weapon and they pulled up and as they were getting out of the car, it appears they were ambushed. They had to retreat back into their car. It was very disturbing. One of them was in surgery for seven hours and had several more surgeries ahead of him. He was critical in those few days. These are rookie cops, brand new. A lot of these cops are really shaken, and they're just trying to make a living. They're not the bad guys who are out here. They're here to protect and serve us. They're not the ones who are out here doing the evil things that we've seen happen with George Floyd and so many other victims.

"My heart breaks for George Floyd and his family. I could not finish watching the film. It just tears me apart to think that that could happen, and that there were other officers who could have done something who chose not to.

"We've got to bring about true community policing that supports everyone, and doesn't look upon someone as a criminal before they get know who they are and what they're about." **NR**

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for 3rd District School Board

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"Kenya Gibson is a working mother who fights for all of us. Kenya has done incredible work advocating for increased school funding and an end to criminalization of our students."

JEFF BOURNE
Virginia State Delegate



"I love Kenya's backbone and her courage. She makes decisions on behalf of our children, and she doesn't let people persuade her otherwise."

DAVID HUDSON
RPS Principal



"We need more representation like Kenya Gibson speaking up and advocating for a better and more equitable system."

KERRY RICHARDSON
Teacher, Barack Obama Elementary School

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THRIVING NOT JUST SURVIVING

Local Businesses that Beat the Odds
During the Pandemic

THE WISE AMONG US LISTENED TO THE SCIENTISTS, and began transforming ourselves to combat a pandemic that is changing the way we live. Denial is a lie, nothing more; and the only way to confront a disease of this magnitude is with the naked truth, as harsh as it may be. That is a hallmark of courage and endurance.

A quality shared by all successful local business owners is resilience, and an ability to think quickly on your feet, knowing when to bob and weave, and when to rope a dope. Richmond's local business community is ruling the ring. As soon as COVID-19 struck, these entrepreneurs rewrote their gamebooks. They adopted protocols issued by the CDC and Governor Northam's office; they reinvented the way they do business. And the community's response has been overwhelming.

The silver lining of this pandemic may be an instruction to us all: Support local businesses, the men and women who live among us and supply us with our needs and services. 2020 has removed the scales from our eyes, and restored perfect vision, making it clear that we should rally around local businesses and not corporations that drain the lifeblood out of our economy.



Appliances on Lakeside.

APPLIANCES ON LAKESIDE

5418 Lakeside Avenue,
with Tammy Kelly

"We're doing a lot of business, we're very blessed, we're very humbled by this community," Tammy Kelly says. "Early on we took efforts to create social distancing. We're doing a lot of replacements, and we have customers looking for packages of appliances. They're ready to update their house. We're very proud of the decisions we've made. We do not do e-commerce; we don't have a cart online. Primarily that's because we really feel like customers should have assistance. They might pick something out, but it's our responsibility to make sure the fit is right for their home and also for their lifestyle."



Linda Arthur.

ARTHUR'S ELECTRIC SERVICE

8910 Brook Road, Glen Allen,
with Linda Arthur

"We've been in business for 97 years," says Linda Arthur. "We sell everything you need for lawn care and landscaping—riding mowers, chain saws, hedge trimmers, everything. We didn't shut down one day and our entire staff is still on, and we're working more than ever. September sales were better than any month in our business's history. A lot of people know us in the neighborhood and they support us. People were afraid—particularly landscapers and homeowners—that they weren't going to be able to have a continuous supply of whatever they needed to get the job done."



Dave Axelle.

AXSELLE AUTO SERVICE

5519 Lakeside Avenue,
with Dave Axelle

"We had to cut hours somewhat, putting our employees on 40 hours instead of 52 hours a week," Dave Axelle says. "But we kept all fourteen members of our staff on. We sanitize three times a day, do the same thing with the cars. A lot of people drop off the cars, leave the keys in them, don't come inside, pay by credit card. A lot of cars we pick up and deliver, so people don't even have to come in. Masks are required. It's a whole different ball game. It's a different animal. We used to be incredibly busy in the morning from 6:30 till 8:30. Now, that's not the norm because everybody's at home with the kids. It's just adjustments. You have to adapt. All small businesses do, and we support all the other businesses in the area. When we go to lunch we try to support our local restaurants, and when we get din-

by **CHARLES MCGUIGAN**



ner at night, we try to hit all the local hot spots in town. We feel blessed to be doing as well as we are.”



Sandra Berry.

BERRY'S PRODUCE

9592 Chamberlayne Road,
with Sandra Berry

“We opened in March and our business has just increased every single day since we’ve been here,” according to Sandra Berry. “When we started this we didn’t know what was going to happen. I knew that produce would sell pretty well, but I didn’t know how the other things that I offered would sell—our flowers, our garden décor. With a lot of people being out of work at that time, I wasn’t sure what was going to happen, and what I found was people came out, people supported me, people were here day in and day out. My business just climbed and in-

creased. We’ve probably increased this year alone by about 60 to 65 percent in sales. We have grown by leaps and bounds. I can’t say enough about my customers and the support that they give me. I am so appreciative. Within 15 to 30 miles I’m getting all the produce that I need to supply my customers. Right off the get go we started with hand sanitizer, and disposable gloves. We installed shields in our register room. We keep all windows, all doors open. It’s all worked for us.”



Catherine McGuigan.

CATHERINE-ROSE.COM

with Catherine McGuigan

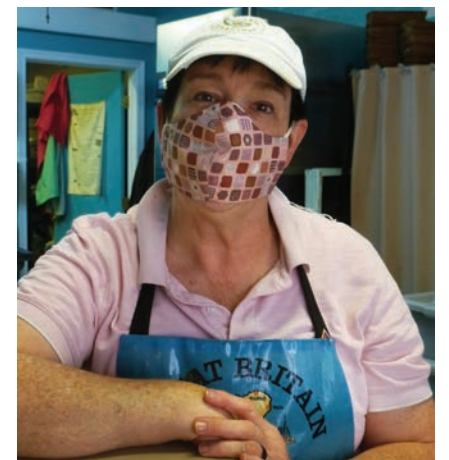
“I think that buying local is going to be a very crucial thing for people to start or continue to wrap their minds around in the coming months and years,” says Catherine McGuigan. “It checks all the boxes— sustainability, transpar-

ency, economy, community. Many local makers and sellers take great care to support one another by sourcing materials and products from one another. Take Little House Green Grocery as an example— they pack that place full of nearby names. I know in my case of art-making when sourcing something directly from Richmond isn’t always feasible, I always strive to at least create my product using materials from maybe a paper company that is very eco-conscious and family run. In both of these cases, you can often see the impact of the choice you, the buyer, are making and can know that your choices are going to be positively affecting the local economy and the community and your friends and family who are very well themselves local makers. I hope that we start to realize this importance, particularly with the coming holiday season. Things like Prime Day (for Amazon) and Black Friday make it extremely easy for consumers to put money in the pockets of big businesses, but I hope that people can see the importance of instead putting that money into the people and communities that care about them.”

CHOCOLATE CRAVINGS

6929 Lakeside Avenue,
with Cathy Churcher

“I lost Easter because of COVID,” says Cathy Churcher. “We didn’t have a market in Williamsburg so I was doing online sales. People are more reluctant to come out and shop, and so that’s how it’s



Cathy Churcher.

effected my business. I’ve managed to keep going because of the graciousness of my customers and I think their willingness to support me during this time. My customers have been very, very generous, over-tipping and coming in here just laying down a hundred dollar bill and saying, ‘Just fill me up’, which is really nice. A few people have said because they can’t take certain things in to nursing homes and retirement communities and because all my stuff is individually wrapped, they have been buying it to give to the doctors or to the nurses who are taking care of people. And so with individually wrapped gifts, it’s a lot easier than taking in donuts or a pan of brownies. So that’s been a real boost for me as well. I’ve gotten a few corporate orders, but it’s obviously down. But I’ve got a good client base who are very supportive, who want me to stay open because they say, ‘You’ve got the best chocolate around.’”



Joe Stankus.

CLASSIC TOUCH CLEANING and THE PAINTING CLASS

1229 Bellevue Avenue,
with Joe and Brenda Stankus

“One of our businesses, the cleaning business, was considered essential,” says Joe Stankus. “All of our employees are back to work now and we’re at about 75 to 80 percent capacity, which is kind of amazing. The Painting Class just started their new classes. We can socially distance properly. Instead of ten in a class, we have six or seven. Now that school is back we’re hoping to pick up more business. We’re optimistic right now. We never received any financial aid. We’re showing a small profit for the year. That’s all we could ask for. We are following all the CDC protocols—masks, gloves, social distancing. All the rags are treated when they come back in before they go out to another house. We never take one rag from one house to another. We don’t even take a rag from one room to another in a house to make sure we don’t spread anything. We’re looking forward to the uptick, which we know is coming.”



Bobby Shore.

DECATUR'S GARAGE

4031 MacArthur Avenue,
with Bobby Shore

“We’ve made it through COVID-19 fairly well so far,” Bobby Shore says. “We lost about half our business the first months. Then customers started trickling in, and then inspections started rolling in and we started to pick up through it. We’re making it through and we’re getting there. It’s coming back. We’re an essential business so that helps a lot. We’re getting back to where we need to be and we just hired another person and that helped. We’re getting there. We follow the protocols. We clean all the countertops and everything else. We’re trying to get through it.”



Jimmy Tsamouras.

DOT'S BACK INN and DEMI'S MEDITERRANEAN KITCHEN

4030 and 4017 MacArthur Avenue,
with Jimmy Tsamouras

“March 17 hit; it was tragedy for everybody,” Jimmy Tsamouras remembers. “We immediately shut our restaurants down and all communication with our customers for their protection and our staff’s protection. We were in a spiral, not knowing where we were going. It was very traumatic, everyone was in a very large panic for personal issues and financial issues. We utilized the first couple weeks to clean and paint and kind of restore our restaurant, hoping we were going to reopen in another week or two once everything calmed down. Unfortunately that’s not the way it went as everybody knows.

April came around and we decided to open Dot’s for curbside pickup, take out, special dinners, things like that. It was well-received by our community, our neighbors and our fans. And then in June when the Governor allowed us to open at some capacity, we did with outdoor dining. Following in July we had the ability at Dot’s to open on the Samis Grotto sidewalk. We are grateful to Samis Grotto for allowing us to do that. It helped out immensely. I feel that customers are still very worried and concerned with due cause, but I think they also feel a little more lightened up, a little calmer. In August we started to do dinners at Demi’s. Things seem to be going fairly well there. It’s pretty much 50 percent capacity inside. We’re very grateful for the customers we have that come in to support us, and they’ve been wonderful. Everyone has been very respectful of one another, wearing masks when they get up to go to the bathroom. I think one of the most important things is to make the customer feel safe and assure them that we are following all the protocols. There’s no reason not to follow protocols; it’s not that hard. Eventually, it just becomes a norm. You get used to it. With local businesses, you get to know your customers, your purveyors, you get to know me and my staff. It’s a lot more than just a generic experience of going into a commercial corporate place.”

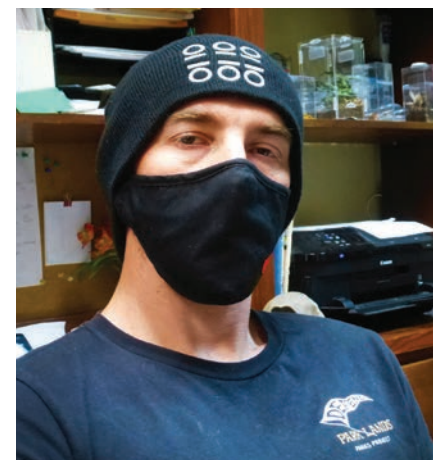


Tim Laxton.

EARLY BIRD BISCUIT

1221 Bellevue Avenue,
with Tim Laxton

“As a carryout establishment, we were well prepared to share all meals to-go,” says Tim Laxton. “We are in compliance with all health guidelines and maintain an excellent inspection report. Since our inception carry-out dining has been our business model at both locations.”



Shane Rippey.

FIN & FEATHER PET CENTER

5208 Lakeside Avenue,
with Shane Rippey

“Initially, with fear of the pandemic, business was a little slow, but rebounded quickly once the pet industry was deemed essential,” says Shane Rippey, manager of Fin & Feather. “It’s been pretty chaotic since then. It’s been extremely busy. We are one of the businesses that can thrive during this situation. Essentially it’s been full speed ahead since about mid-April. Even with closing early multiple days of the week for about three months, we’ve still had very strong sales. We’ve had a lot of support from people who want to support local businesses. We’ve had good turnout from new customers even in that regard. And from the beginning we have followed the protocols.”

VOTE

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HOB NOB with Tracey Thoroman.

HOBNOB

6010 Hermitage Road,
with Tracey Thoroman

“COVID struck and on March 15 we decided to close the doors for inside dining, and March 17 we opened a sort of drive through format, and that

worked pretty well,” Tracey Thoroman recalls. “It was a little slow at the beginning, but over the first month it started to pick up greatly. People have been really supportive. They’ve been supportive to our staff and adding gratuities that maybe weren’t as common with to-go food. I think people saw the benefit of helping us get our staff through this. It was pretty amazing. People have been very supportive. We’re starting to talk about opening inside. We’re building a new patio, which is coming along pretty nicely now. We did a bathroom interior renovation as well. We’ll open up a few inside, and a few on our new covered patio, and a couple on the existing patio on nice days. The new patio will be covered and maybe use an infrared heater. That’s the thing about independent business owners, you have to figure it out. You can’t just roll over. I feel like Richmond’s got to be one of the top cities in the country as far as supporting local businesses.”

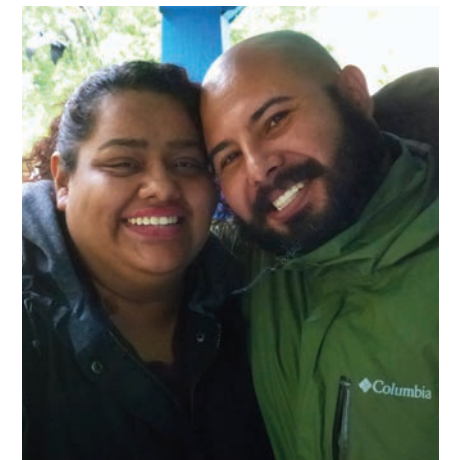


Sharon and Peter Francisco.

LAKESIDE FARMERS’ MARKET

with Sharon and Peter Francisco

“We are in our thirteenth year,” Peter Francisco says. “COVID-19 has completely changed the way the market operates, totally opposite from what we had in the past. The market was a place where people could gather, shake hands, hug each other, go inside the booths, pick out their produce, and really have a lot of conversations with the farmers. Number one, masks are required. Number two, every customer has to stay six feet apart. All produce is roped off from the customers. The customers stand back and they pick and choose. Luckily we have not seen a drop in customers. The community has been very supportive and they’ve been more than supportive of our requirement on the masks and social distancing. They feel like that’s something we’re doing that makes it safer for them.”



Gasmin and Victor Ayala.

MY OUTDOOR PROJECT

with Gasmin and Victor Ayala

“We were a little bit nervous with the pandemic, we thought we were going to slow down,” Victor Ayala says, then looks to his wife. “My right hand is Gasmin.” She nods and adds: “We did think things were going to slow down, but since people got stuck at home, they kept looking at their yards and they were like, ‘We want projects.’ So while they were working at home, we were working outside. We have been able to keep a steady flow. I try to stay in the office and do most of the office work, and Victor is outside with a crew of two. We do landscaping and hardscaping and we do fencing as well. We try to accommodate what the customer wants and their visions. And we are very thankful for the community around us. We’ve been able to have a steady flow.”

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Nicole Roberts.

NICOLA FLORA

1219 Bellevue Avenue,
with Nicole Roberts

“We didn’t really close when the pandemic started back in March,” Nicole Robert tells me. “We were open, but we didn’t really have anyone coming into the shop. So my husband and I started with contactless curbside pickup and delivery. We’re available for curbside pickup. Local delivery is free here in the neighborhood, and our neighbors have been very, very supportive. You can order online, or you can call us. You can give us your credit card, you can do Venmo, you can pay cash. People have come by and opened up their trunks and I just put it in. I am so thankful for my neighbors and they keep supporting us and I really appreciate that. We’re doing the best that we can, and trying to make people happy with flowers.”



Katelin Heim.

NORTHSIDE DENTAL CO,

3404 Hermitage Road,
with Katelin Heim

“This has been a dream project to be in this location and to serve Northside for so long, so we were definitely going to jump on the opportunity to open,” says Katelin Heim. “Being able to be here at a convenient location so our neighbors can come and get their oral health taken care of in this time is really important to us. We have masks and sanitize constantly. We have filters that take the smallest particles out of the air that could possibly be transmitted. We take all precautions with our staff and any one coming into our building. The response has been phenomenal. We’ve seen people coming to support us, but also, I think everyone’s flexible schedules have allowed them to get their dental appointments taken care of now more than ever. So, we’re booked out a few months and we’re keeping up with the demand which is a really great thing to have especially during this time.”



Bob Kocher.

ONCE UPON A VINE

4009 MacArthur Avenue,
with Bob Kocher

“We are considered an essential business since we sell beer and wine,” according to Bob Kocher. “We have lost three employees—not from the pandemic—they are afraid to deal with people and the public, but we have rearranged our scheduling. We’ve reduced our hours to take care of the fact that we only have three people working here. We are still servicing our neighborhood which has been fantastic to us. We were actually the first business to follow the protocols with the masks in the city. We’ve maintained that ever since February. Everybody was required to wear a mask, if they didn’t have a mask we would sell them a mask. We also offered curbside service if people didn’t have a mask or didn’t want to come in. We sanitize the store every evening and twice during the day. Business now is about normal for what we were prior to the pandemic. And that is due to the fact that people realize our new hours and they are abiding by the mask requirement.”

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North Carolina State
University, BA

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ASSOCIATIONS AND
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Richmond Criminal Bar
Association

Virginia Bar Association

Richmond Juvenile Bar
Association

Caroline County Bar
Association

john@mainstlaw.com

804.355.1800



Rebecca D'Angelo.

REBECCA D'ANGELO

with Virginia Capital Realty

"Initially we thought COVID-19 was really going to affect the market, but so far it doesn't seem to have," Rebecca D'Angelo says. "It's still a seller's market, and if you're in the 250 or below price range, things are very competitive. I just put an offer on the other day. Thirty bids on it. It's definitely kind of a crazy seller's market. But it's still a great time to buy because the rates are so low—they're 2.5, 2.9. They're historically low and they're expected to remain that way for a little bit. I would say it's a great time to buy in Richmond, and it's a great time to sell."



Chris Rich.

RICH'S STITCHES

4013 MacArthur Avenue,
with Chris Rich

"COVID has been an experience," says Chris Rich. "March 19 we closed down for about two months. We did get the P3 (Paycheck Protection Program) and started back up the middle of June, and we have been full-fledged since then. Business has been coming back slowly every week. We are following all the protocols that the Governor has put out. We are appointment only, working three days a week, one day from home. Three-quarters of our customers are coming back by appointment only, wearing a mask and following the procedures everyone's asking for. We do some online, but people still want to take the time to come in and do. Ninety-eight percent of them are wearing a mask when they're coming in. If not, I give them a mask. It's been great. We can't really complain. We're blessed to be able to be open."



Vickie Hall.

STIR CRAZY CAFE

4015 MacArthur Avenue,
with Vickie Hall

"After we shut down in mid-March we did some updates to the interior," Vickie Hall says. "Obviously, we cleaned everything very well, but we also put up a new mural where our art used to hang so we have a nice beautiful mural until we can have art hanging up again when people are inside. We tried doing some service from the front door before we had to shut down in March, then we opened back up in mid-May with contactless curbside pick-up. You could either pick up from the table, or we'd bring it to your car, and we're still continuing to do that. It's going very well and everyone has really supported us in that, so it's been great. Before, we always had regulars that we'd see inside the coffee shop, but since we started just doing the pick-up out front we have regulars again, and some of them are people we never saw before. They're new customers and they keep coming back, and we really appreciate all the support. We reduced a lot of the items on the menu, just kind of pared it down and made it simpler, but also brought in a lot of new ingredients and fresh new things."

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Amy Foxworthy.

THE MILL ON MACARTHUR

4023 MacArthur Avenue,
with Amy Foxworthy

"We actually closed on March 18 and didn't reopen until the end of May," Amy Foxworthy remembers. "During that period we were able to come in and just completely clean everything. We took out all of the equipment from the kitchen, we did some repairs, and just did a really thorough deep-cleaning. Partly so we could stay active and also so that a few folks who were strug-

gling getting any kind of unemployment could make a little bit of money in the interim until we were able to reopen. The majority of people were able to get unemployment, but a lot of folks never received it; I don't think a lot of people realize that. We also had a number of folks who never received the stimulus check. We were also really worried about reopening knowing that when we did reopen it would have to be mostly delivery and carry-out, which we're continuing right now. We went ahead and switched up our point-of-sales system to allow for an online ordering platform so that folks could do curbside and order and pay online instead of coming in, making it a little easier and streamlined for everybody. A lot of people want to come in and dine in, but unfortunately right now it's just not feasible. We would only be able to really seat three or four tables at most with the social distancing and that would be impractical at this point. It's always been a wonderful neighborhood, everyone's always been very supportive. It's lovely that people are excited about what we're doing. It's still all very hopeful."



Steve Culler.

THE CANE CONNECTION

6941 Lakeside Avenue,
with Steve Culler


"We re-cane chairs," says Steve Culler. "During the pandemic because of the nature of our business we were able to stay open and work through the whole thing because there are only two of us in the shop, and when people come in they bring their chairs to our patio. Everybody of course is wearing a mask. So we stay outside, we keep our distance. We either receive the chairs from the customer or the chair is picked up by the customer. In any case there is very little contact, and we've managed to pull it off pretty well. We're still open, and nobody's sick. Business is fine. We didn't lose any time at all."



Santos Contreras.

ZORBA'S PIZZA EXPRESS

4026 MacArthur Avenue,
with Jimmy Contreras

"What we doing here in Zorba's is use the masks and the gloves for everyone's protection," says Jimmy. "The business is doing well. We are staying busy. We still got the same delivery and pick-up. Inside we never really had much of a business. So not much has really changed for us, except the masks and gloves." 



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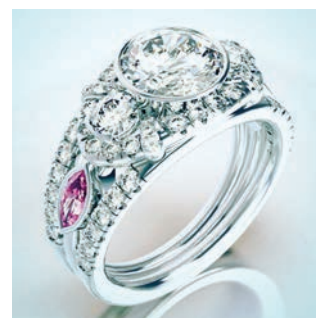


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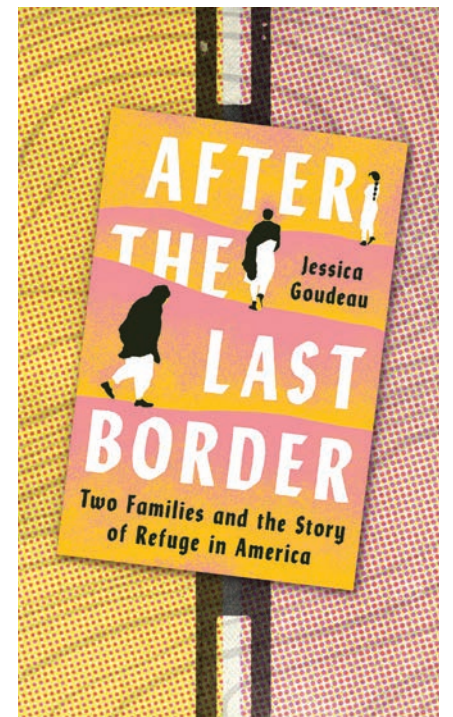
IN “AFTER THE LAST Border,” author Jessica Goudeau shares the real life accounts of two women who seek to escape civil war, persecution, and violence in their home countries. It is a riveting story that mesmerized me for days and interrupted my sleep. I could not stop thinking about people whose daily lives are fraught with such danger.

Mu Naw spends most of her life in refugee camps, fleeing persecution in Myanmar, before she and her family are able to come to the United States and settle in Austin, Texas. (Refugee camp life is harsh, and I was shocked to learn that the average amount of time people spend there is a mind-numbing twenty-six years.)

Goudeau’s description of Mu Naw’s first few weeks in our country is heart-rending. Their apartment lacks basic necessities, and they do not know how to work the air conditioner. But Mu Naw is incredibly resilient and eventually crafts a life for herself here, a difficult process that takes years.

In Syria, Hansa and her husband have five living children, are well off, and enjoy a warm family life before civil war turns everything upside down. People are tortured and killed. Bombs fall. Residents flee. Like Mu Naw, Hansa comes to Austin with her husband and youngest daughter. She leaves her beautiful Syrian home reluctantly, feeling she has no other choice. Authorities assure her the rest of her family can join her when their paperwork is completed since the U.S. supports family reunification. She, her husband (who has been severely injured during a bombing) and her daughter find themselves in a small apartment, very different from the comfortable home they left behind. Hansa, who did not have a job in Syria, enters the work force but struggles to pay the rent. She is the sole breadwinner since her youngest daughter is in high school and her husband is disabled.

When Trump is elected president, his policy disrupts the plans of immigrants from certain countries who are preparing to come to America, even those who already have family here.



Hansa’s children are among those affected. She does not know if she will ever see them again. Because family is so important to her, she wrestles with depression, guilt, and sorrow.

Goudeau blends the stories of these two women with descriptions of how American immigration policy has changed over the last several decades. The United States has at times truly been a refuge for those seeking safety, but not always. I was not aware that our country had turned away a boatload of refugees from Hungary during World War II. And of course our current policy is not exactly welcoming.

Goudeau explains that refugee life can create such complex trauma for the parents that the DNA of their children is altered. The thought of people dealing with that kind of terror haunts me. What courage it must take to leave the only culture one has ever known and start over again in a strange land.

Mu Naw and Hansa are women of incredible strength. The very least we can do, then, is to listen to their stories. **NS**

After the Last Border: Two Families and the Story of Refuge in America
By Jessica Goudeau
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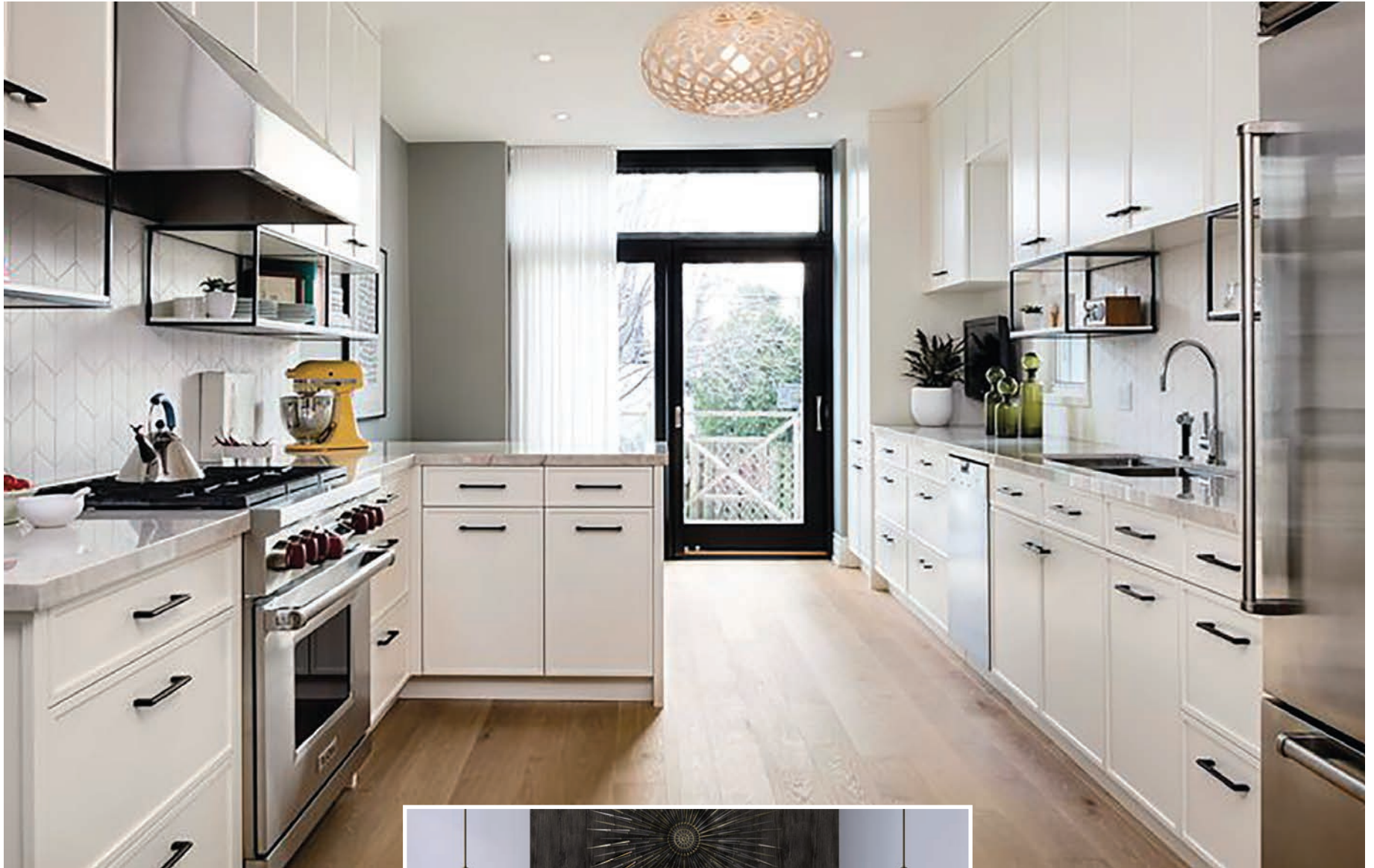
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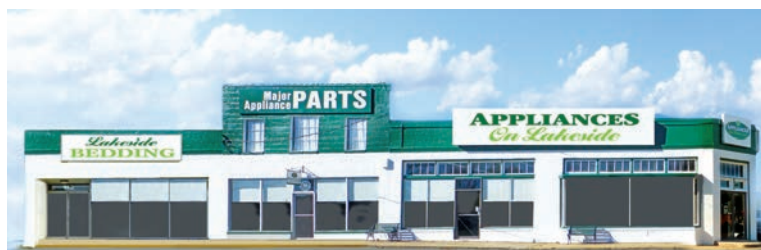


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