

● Richmond Times-Dispatch

Discover

— R I C H M O N D —



FEB / MAR 2019

\$3.95

02>



B E H I N D THE
SCENES II

Kings Dominion, the Pump House and more



38



28

- ARCHIVE DIVE** Cool artifacts in Virginia collections 8
- CHECK IT OUT** Surprises at the public library 14
- VIRGINIA IN THE BALANCE** The Sea Venture's amazing voyage 24
- BLUE AMID GRAY** The Union in the heart of the Confederacy 28
- BEHIND THE SCENES** Unexpected perspectives at familiar sites 38
- NATURAL HISTORY** A wingspan like no other 51
- TIME CAPSULE** "The War of the Worlds" in Richmond 52
- BACK TO CLASS** The science of emotion 54
- BUILT TO LAST** Humpback Bridge spans the ages 56
- THE GRAPEVINE** Jack Berninger on Meritage 60
- SEASONAL TASTE** Holly Prestidge and Clare Osdene Schapiro 62
- GOING UP** Wallpaper is sticking around again 64
- NATURE NOTES** The fantastic fungi kingdom 69
- TOM ALLEN** You've got a "friend"? 70

FEEDBACK

To comment on this issue, email discover@timesdispatch.com or call (804) 649-6990 (during business hours).



56



14



62

SAXON

SHOE SHOPPING
THE WAY IT SHOULD BE

Women's | Men's | Children's | Accessories



Short Pump Town Center | 804.285.3473
The Village at Spotsylvania Towne Centre | 540.736.8600

www.saxonsohes.com



BEHIND THE SCENES

TEXT BY BILL LOHMANN | PHOTOS BY BOB BROWN

We're always looking for excuses to get out of the office, so photographer Bob Brown and I will go just about anywhere for a story.

For this feature alone, we peered into a former hospital's ancient operating room, traipsed around a historic coal mining site, strolled through the city's former waterworks, ventured to a famous hotel rooftop and even scaled a roller coaster hill — with no help from the ride.

And there wasn't even any pie.

Regular readers know that Bob and I frequently seek out a slice of heaven, but for Discover Richmond, our adventure instead is finding uncommon perspectives at familiar places. This is our second installment of behind-the-scene excursions for the magazine — the first was published in the February 2018 edition.

We hope you enjoy this one as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Bill and Bob are ready for more adventure. Send ideas for future behind-the-scenes locations to Bill at wlohmann@timesdispatch.com.

TUNE IN

On March 28 at 9 p.m., Bob Brown and Bill Lohmann will be featured in a new documentary on Community Idea Stations WCVE (Richmond) and WHTJ (Charlottesville). "Back Roads: People, Places and Pie Around Virginia" accompanies Brown and Lohmann on their adventures — and pie consumption.

TAKE A NEW LOOK AT FAMILIAR PLACES **PAGES 40-49**



▼ QUIET THRILLS AT A THEME PARK

Kings Dominion

Most of us know Kings Dominion only at its most boisterous — when the gates are open, the rides are humming and the Hanover County theme park is teeming with visitors.

So, it feels a little unnatural to show up on a cold, clear morning in the dead of winter. The place is quiet and nearly empty ... except for workers taking down Winterfest decorations (including from the Eiffel Tower) and preparing for the park's reopening in the spring.

Our guide was Wayne C. Fuqua, manager of rides maintenance (that's him on Page 39). He has worked at Kings Dominion since 1977 — when he was in high school, wore a costume and operated a number of rides.

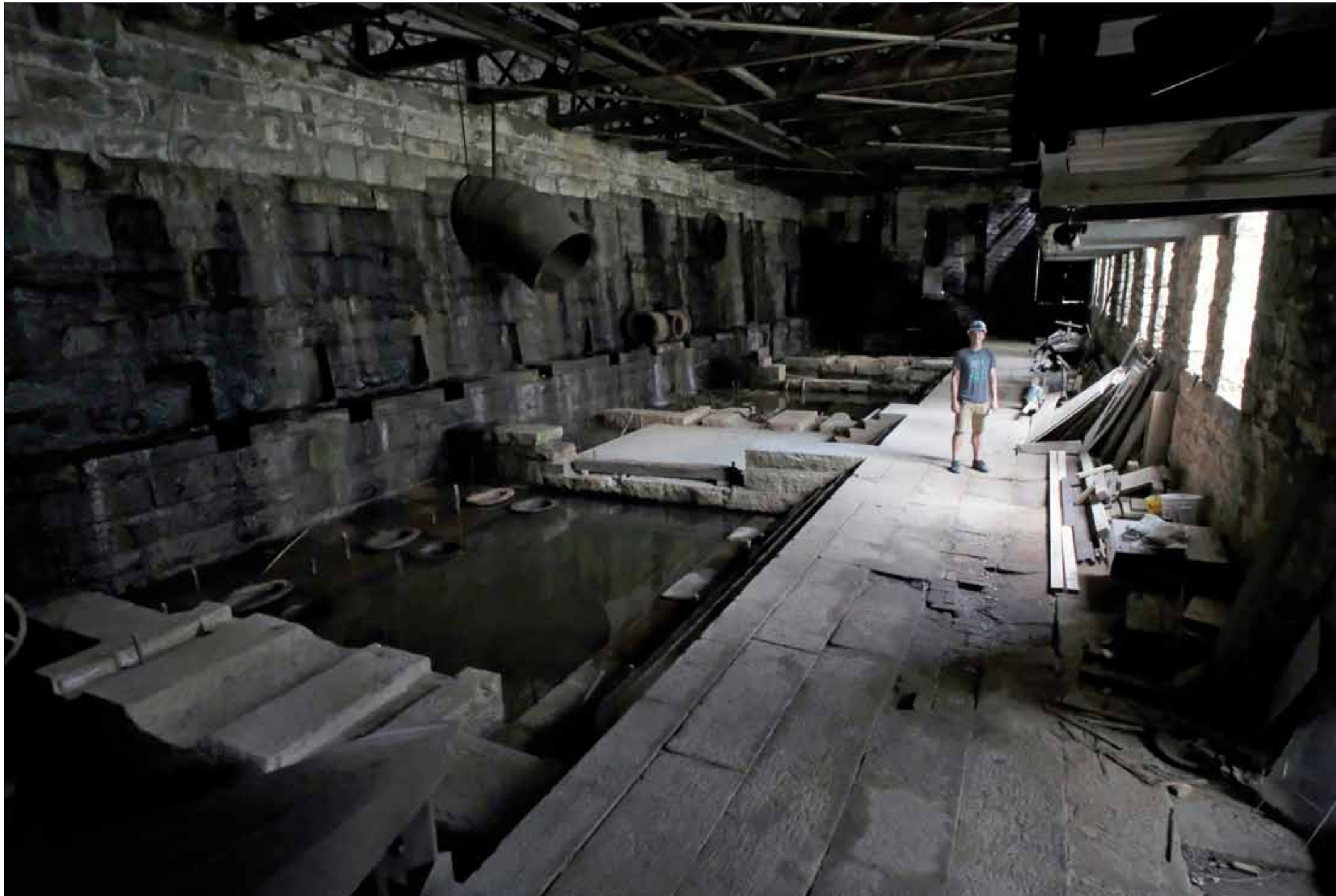
We climbed the stairs to the top of the big hill (111 feet, thank you) on Twisted Timbers, a normally rowdy wood-and-steel

roller coaster. We visited the maintenance shed, where cars for longtime coaster Racer 75 (formerly the Rebel Yell) had that vintage look. We strolled among the wooden horses of the tranquil carousel, now working on its second century. And we wandered alone through a haunted maze called "No Vacancy: Condemned," which operates during the park's Halloween Haunt in the fall and tells the story of a wedding party that mysteriously vanished at an old hotel. It was slightly creepy, even out of season.

After high school, Fuqua moved to the maintenance department. Other than the park, the only other place he worked was a cold storage company ... where he drove a forklift for six weeks ... in a freezer. Then, Kings Dominion offered him a full-time job.

"It was a no-brainer to come back," he said with a laugh.





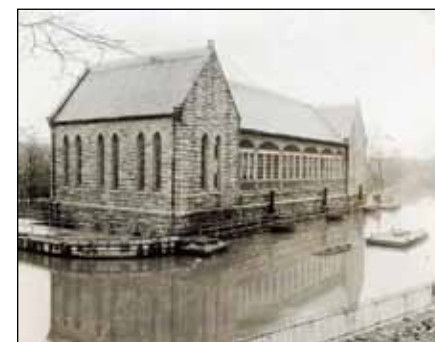
NEW SHINE FOR ‘THE CROWN JEWEL’ Pump House at Byrd Park

Greetings exchanged, Will Whiteside handed us hard hats and led us into the dim light of the old Pump House, where the interior gloom belies the exterior majesty. Once known as the Castle on the James,

the Gothic Revival structure in Richmond’s Byrd Park — just west of the Boulevard Bridge on the Kanawha Canal — does indeed give off a regal vibe, despite its age and condition. “We just don’t want to see this go to sham-

bles,” said Whiteside, outreach coordinator with the Friends of the Pump House volunteer group. “And if there was no effort made, it might.”

Constructed in the 1880s, the city-owned Pump House drew river and canal water and pumped it uphill to the Byrd Park Reservoir. It served as the city’s waterworks until 1924, and it doubled as a gathering spot for the well-heeled: Its open-air dance hall on the top floor overlooks the canal.



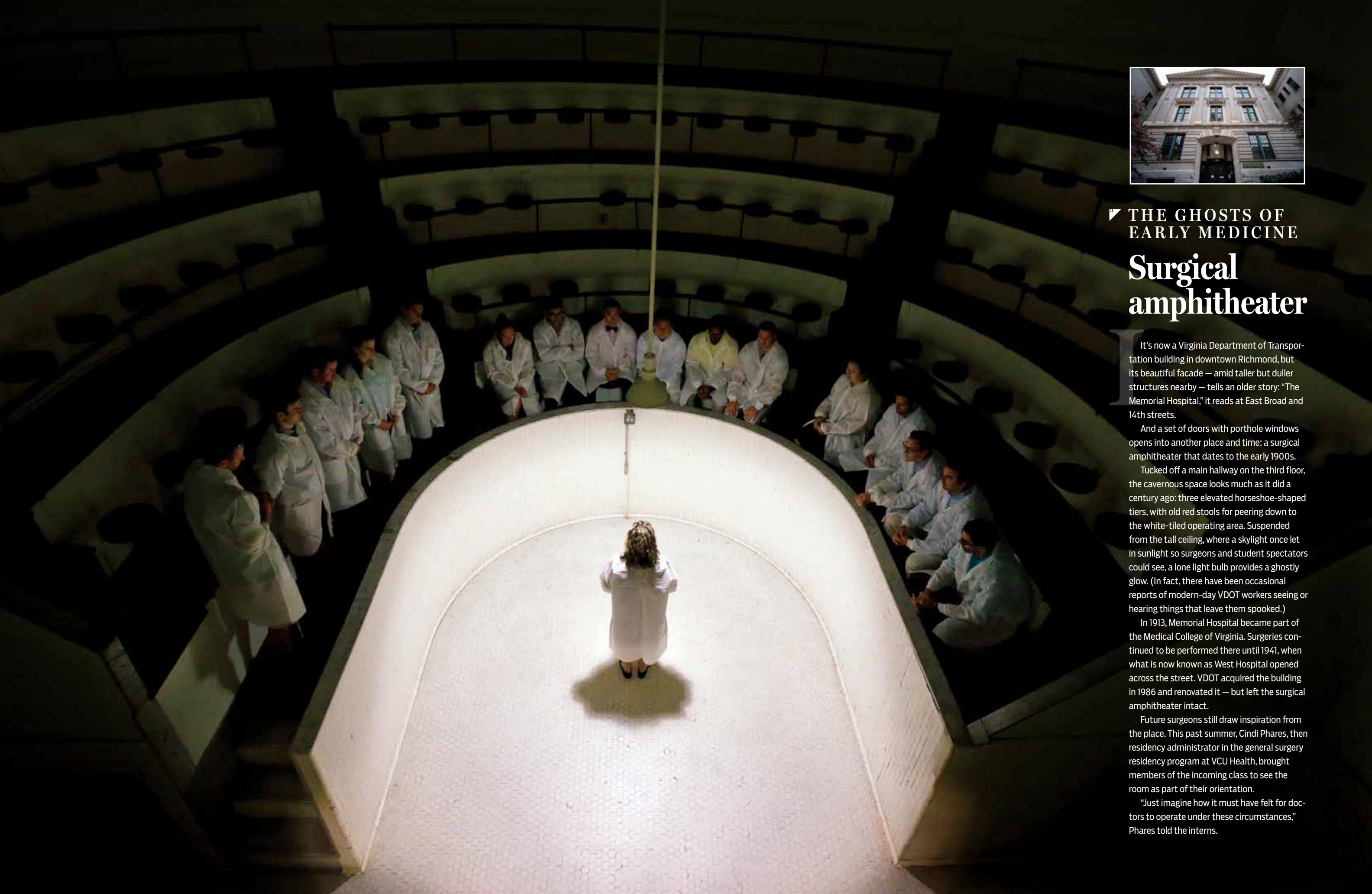
By midcentury, though, it was done as an attraction and a pumping station — its machinery was sold for scrap metal during World War II — and it has sat unused and neglected in the years since, escaping demolition but searching for a renewed purpose. (The photo at left is from 1950.) The Pump House is closed to the public except for occasional tours.

Whiteside walked us past piles of metal scraps from a power generation unit on our way to the main pump room. The original guts

of the operation now feel like a Halloween haunted mansion: The giant pump wheels are long gone, but the sound of running water echoes off the granite walls.

Then we climbed the stairs to the dance hall — with its expansive wooden plank floor, arched openings and stained-glass windows — for a glimpse of the once-exquisite public space that Friends hopes might become public and exquisite once again.

“The crown jewel,” Whiteside said.



▼ THE GHOSTS OF EARLY MEDICINE

Surgical amphitheater

It's now a Virginia Department of Transportation building in downtown Richmond, but its beautiful facade — amid taller but duller structures nearby — tells an older story: “The Memorial Hospital,” it reads at East Broad and 14th streets.

And a set of doors with porthole windows opens into another place and time: a surgical amphitheater that dates to the early 1900s.

Tucked off a main hallway on the third floor, the cavernous space looks much as it did a century ago: three elevated horseshoe-shaped tiers, with old red stools for peering down to the white-tiled operating area. Suspended from the tall ceiling, where a skylight once let in sunlight so surgeons and student spectators could see, a lone light bulb provides a ghostly glow. (In fact, there have been occasional reports of modern-day VDOT workers seeing or hearing things that leave them spooked.)

In 1913, Memorial Hospital became part of the Medical College of Virginia. Surgeries continued to be performed there until 1941, when what is now known as West Hospital opened across the street. VDOT acquired the building in 1986 and renovated it — but left the surgical amphitheater intact.

Future surgeons still draw inspiration from the place. This past summer, Cindi Phares, then residency administrator in the general surgery residency program at VCU Health, brought members of the incoming class to see the room as part of their orientation.

“Just imagine how it must have felt for doctors to operate under these circumstances,” Phares told the interns.



▼ A SIGN OF THE TIMES — THEN AND NOW

Hotel John Marshall rooftop

One of Richmond's most distinctive landmarks is the old (yet new) sign atop the old Hotel John Marshall.

The 16-story historic building in Richmond was the largest hotel in Virginia when it opened in 1929. It has been through a lot of changes in the past few decades — it's now an apartment building known as Residences at the John Marshall — but through it all, the sign has remained a beacon of downtown.

For an up-close view, building manager Beverly Lam led us on an expedition to great heights. That included an elevator ride, a climb up an internal stairway — which took some effort to even find — and then a rooftop exit that placed us just below and behind the sign. (For maintenance, the sign is accessed by a pull-down ladder in a mechanical room directly below it.)

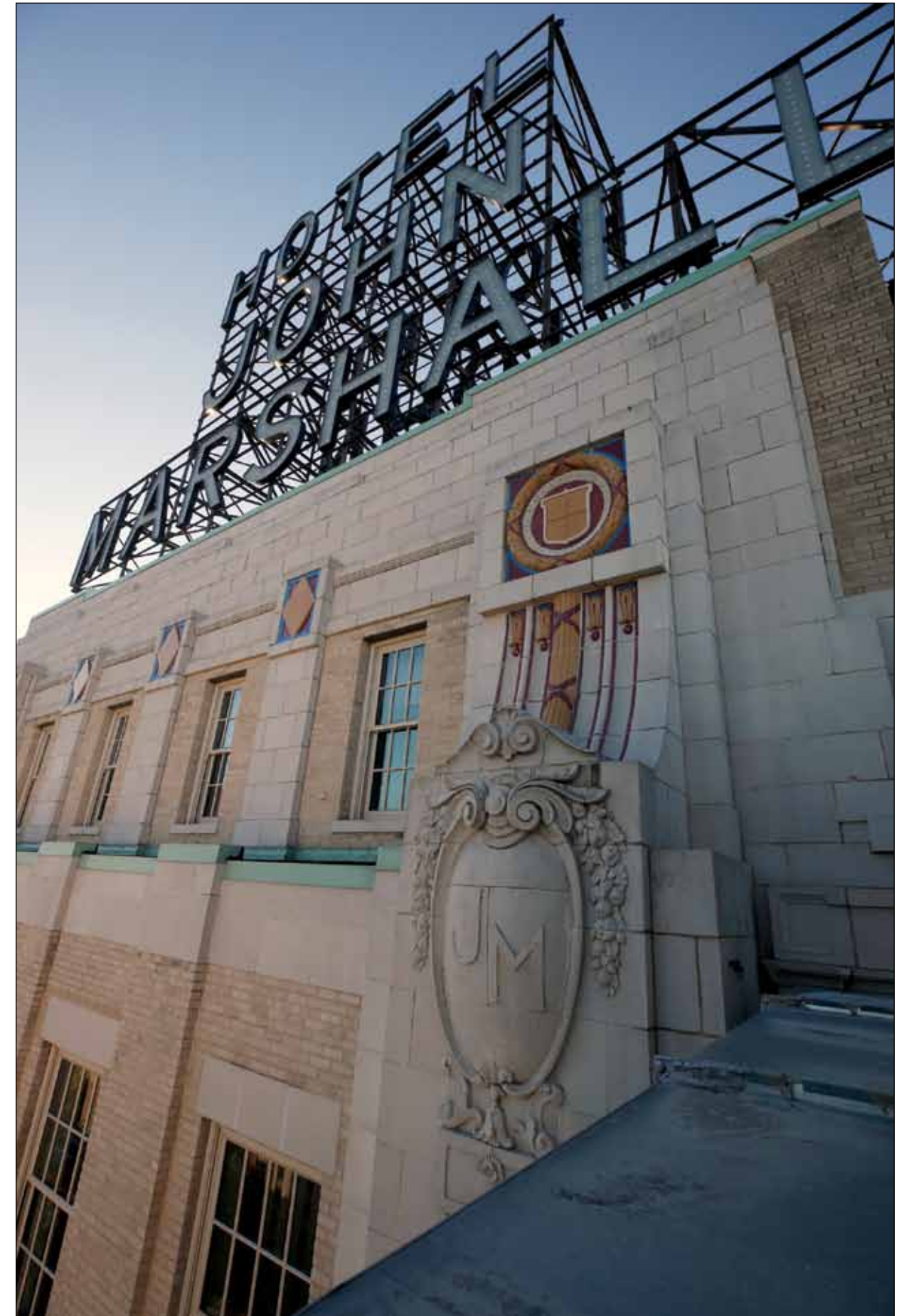
The sign was as impressive from that perch as you might imagine, and so was the stunning architecture of the John Marshall's higher points. We also had a more-than-decent view of downtown.

The building underwent a \$70 million renovation that was completed in 2011, breathing new life into the old place. The project included an overhaul of the signature sign: It had rusted, was in great need of repair ... and, with its 1,400 incandescent bulbs,



was an energy hog to boot.

Still, Lam said, removing the sign wasn't a consideration. Holiday Signs of Chester created new lettering that maintained the sign's vintage look — but that featured low-voltage LED lighting for greater energy efficiency.





▼ WHERE RUINS MARK A DEEP HISTORY

Mid-Lothian Mines Park

The sturdy fence is made of rebar and railroad ties, and that seems appropriate: This was one of North America's first major industrial sites, and the area was home to the first railroad in Virginia.

Robert P. "Peppy" Jones unlocked the fence gate so we could mosey up the hill at Mid-Lothian Mines Park in Chesterfield County, where the stone and brick ruins of the Grove Shaft operation hint at such impressive history. Local coal mining dates to the 1730s — it helped fuel the nation's industrial development — and it literally put Midlothian on the map.

Jones, now retired, was still executive director of the Mid-Lothian Mines and Railroad Foundation when he took us on a tour this past summer. Most of the park is wide open to visitors: It includes an amphitheater for concerts, a network of lovely trails and the dramatic reproduction of the 17-ton headstock, which raised and lowered men

and material into the old Middle Shaft mine next to what is now Woolridge Road.

But among the fenced-off areas is the Grove Shaft, site of an 1882 explosion that killed 32 miners. The ruins include crumbling walls of the ventilation building. A circular opening once housed a steam-driven fan, which moved air through the mine 24 hours a day. Some retracted chain-link fencing reveals an opening to the ventilation shaft.

And then there's the Grove Shaft itself. Jones highlighted the heavy-duty wire barrier that covers the opening, which descends 625 feet into the earth and is now filled with water.

Decades ago, there were no such barricades. The old mining site represented the perfect playground for children with fertile imaginations — such as Jones, who grew up a short walk away.

"This was the best place in the world," he said.