





See **Page 82** for the price breakdown of more dishes from area restaurants

SAISON

**RUNDOWN,  
\$24**

- Coconut milk.....75¢
- Onion, ginger, garlic, habanero, chipotle.....50¢
- Turmeric, allspice, thyme.....25¢
- Sweet potato.....25¢
- Regionally sourced seafood (3 ounces each)
- Mussels.....\$1.05
- Shrimp.....\$1.90
- Catfish.....84¢
- Monkfish.....93¢
- Rockfish.....\$1.31
- Prep labor.....\$2

Total Food/Prep Cost  
**\$9.78**

**Food Cost      40.7%**

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SHOW ME  
THE MONEY

✧ THE ✧

# DOLLARS OF DINING

## RESTAURATEURS CRUNCH NUMBERS, BREAK DOWN COSTS AND LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE



The food and beverage industry is one of the most impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. A number of restaurants have shut their doors in its wake, and more will surely follow. The industry is changing daily to survive, pivoting to take-out, market concepts and wine clubs, reopening dining rooms with reduced capacity and creating outdoor dining areas.

We explore the business side of restaurants, showing why every dollar and diner are more important than ever and shedding light on operating costs, the pros and cons of tipping, and the slim profit margins of some popular dishes. Although no two restaurants are alike, we hope to set the table for a better understanding of the forces that drive the business.

*illustrations by Sam Gray* || *photos by Justin Chezney*

# BEHIND BRENNER *by Eileen Mellon*

**\$** Money is not something most restaurant owners like to discuss, especially when the main goal at the moment is survival.

In mid-April, I first spoke with Brittany Anderson, the James Beard Award-nominated chef and co-owner of Brenner Pass and Metzger Bar & Butchery, about the costs of operating the restaurants, specifically Brenner Pass, the Alpine-inspired venture in Scott's Addition.

Four months later, Brenner's dining room remains closed for the safety of the staff, with its outdoor patio open for dinner. Although there have been a number of changes in that time — the lifting of indoor dining bans; the launch of a blue-crab delivery service, Sharktooth Seafood, with her uncle; checking employees' temperatures daily; two-hour limits for diners; and cocktails being sold to-go — one thing has remained constant: fighting to keep her restaurants alive.

"At a place like Brenner, we break even at 100 percent capacity," Anderson says of the restaurant she co-owns with wine director Nathan Conway, beverage director James Kohler, former pastry chef Olivia Wilson and Brad Hemp. "I need my sales to be minimum, \$40,000 a week — just to pretty much break even."

Since the onset of the pandemic, Anderson says Brenner Pass is making anywhere from 15% to 25% of its pre-pandemic revenue. "We're losing between \$5,000 to \$10,000 every week," she says. "Right now, I would say that is probably pretty average at most places, depending on your rent."

That statement is the gut-wrenching reality faced by restaurant owners, and it's why many wonder whether their restaurants will ever return to normal. According to the Independent Restaurant Coalition, it is projected that 85% of independent restaurants could close due to COVID-19's effects on businesses.

While each restaurant has its own unique blueprint — size, location, concept — and Brenner Pass is a larger, 140-seat venture, the majority of them function with single-digit profit margins and have always done so. Since COVID-19, these barely scraping by margins reveal the fragility of an industry that relies almost entirely on having its dining rooms open and its bars occupied.

"Ideally, you're hoping for margins of 7% to 10% profitability, which is a perfectly run restaurant," Anderson says while going over profit and loss reports from Brenner Pass. "We don't share this stuff a lot — everyone is often quiet when talking about profit margins."



The dining room inside Brenner Pass remains closed

## STAYING TRUE

Although many restaurants continue to offer strictly takeout, it doesn't mean that quality has wavered. Hand-made pasta, Seven Hills Beef, local greens and charcuterie plates all grace Brenner's to-go menu.

"Our burger is \$16," she says. "I want to charge \$18, even if I'm putting it in a to-go box. The to-go box isn't coming back; I have to buy those repeatedly, and that gets factored into the price. If we want to be more equitable, our industry needs to charge more for food."

At restaurants where the menu evolves with the seasons, or even weekly or daily, there is more room for food prices to fluctuate.

Restaurants with a consistent menu, or perhaps those that are part of a large group, can purchase bulk orders, which helps with maintaining more consistent costs.

Sourcing is another key factor in costs. Anderson notes that premium, locally sourced ingredients are more expensive.

"Are [diners] thinking about the Trainums [of Autumn Olive Farms] and their farm and the pigs they raise and all the money and time they spend?" she asks. "Are they thinking about Jo Pendergraph at Manakintowne [Specialty Growers]? That's where their money is going. It's a big chain, and I don't think people think about their food like that."

FROM LEFT: ALEXIS COURTNEY; KATE THOMPSON, COURTESY BRITTANNY ANDERSON

## A LOOK INSIDE THE BOOKS OF ONE OF RICHMOND'S TOP RESTAURANTS



### EVERYTHING ELSE

Operating a restaurant doesn't stop at food and labor.

"There are the other things people don't really remember or think about," says Anderson, as if sharing a secret when discussing overhead costs.

She is referencing rent, fees to participate in OpenTable's online reservation platform, cleaning supplies, vendor surcharges, utilities, takeout supplies, paper goods, and flowers, decor and linen rentals when the dining room reopens, which she envisions will not be anytime soon. Since the pandemic started, the costs have also included personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitizer dispensing stations and patio furniture.

When asked whether it's important for diners to understand the cost of operating restaurants, even with an unknown fate, Anderson responds, "I do, especially those fixed costs. If I close [my dining room], I still have to pay rent."

Operating costs related to labor and food may be down due to fewer staffers and customers, but even without diners inside, a restaurant remains an expensive business. Whether there are 10 people at Brenner Pass or 100, many expenses don't cease.

### A NEW CHAPTER

Since the pandemic, Brenner has condensed its staff, relying on an all-hands-on-deck approach. Anderson believes this is a chance to ignite a systematic change in the restaurant community.

"I think you'll see a lot of restaurants move into a more 'everybody helps with everything' model," she

says, noting that managers prep in the kitchen or expedite food to tables, while chefs hop in the dish pit and servers answer phones. "Those are the people that will be valuable in this new world, people [who] can do everything."

Besides salaried managers, Brenner's BOH staff now make \$15 an hour, while FOH staff make \$5 an hour. Currently employees are given two weeks of paid sick leave to self-quarantine or get tested, if needed. The goal is to introduce a service charge that will be added to customers' checks to support the new system — if a diner leaves an additional tip, it will be split between the non-salaried bartenders and servers. Both Brenner and Metzger want to embrace this system moving forward.

"We believe this is the right direction the industry needs to be headed," Anderson says. "We are lucky we got the kick in the pants to do what we did."

To support these operational changes, Anderson says menu costs need to rise. Just as restaurants are adapting, guests will have to do so as well.

"The system is broken, and in order to fix it, the guest is going to have to take a hit here, and it's not that they'll be paying more, it's that their tips won't be a voluntary thing," Anderson says. "It will be included in the price of the goods. We have to make changes, and some people will have to make sacrifices." ■

## PAYING THE BILLS

Examples of expenses Brenner Pass forks over:

**COGS=Cost of Goods Sold**  
Food and alcohol, plus anything that is necessary to provide the product to the guest — menus, takeout supplies, etc.

Total for 2019:  
**\$722,430 or 36% of sales**

**RENT** \$11,000/month  
Includes fees to pay off the original restaurant build-out

**OpenTable** \$550/month  
Brenner Pass is currently offering reservation-only patio dining, making this platform vital

**UTILITIES** \$3,300/month  
Phone, internet services, power and water

**PPE** \$2,000  
Initial investment of hand sanitizing stations, hand sanitizer, thermometers, gloves and masks

**PATIO FURNITURE** \$2,500  
New umbrellas, tables, vinyl signs and tents purchased upon reopening the patio.

**LINENS** \$400/week  
The average amount spent when the dining room was open

**CREDIT CARD PROCESSING FEES** \$69,000 (2019)  
Cost of processing credit card payments

**PAYROLL** \$864,000 (2019) or 43% of sales  
Cost (including federal and state taxes) of paying all employees and owners

## A NIGHT ON THE TOWN

**\$100 + \$20 + \$12.75 = \$132.75**  
Dinner Tip Meals and sales tax Total

After deducting labor (\$43) and food/beverage costs (\$36),  
**PROFIT = \$21**

# CULINARY CALCULATIONS

## AREA CHEFS REVEAL THE PRICING BEHIND MENU ITEMS



How much do menu items, from idea to inception, cost a restaurant? Typically, chefs aim for their overall food costs to hover around 30%, but in some cases, as seen below, that number is higher. Despite a shift in diners' desire for higher-quality, locally sourced and seasonal ingredients, most menu prices have not kept pace with rising overhead costs, an increasingly competitive market and the significant prep labor some dishes can require. Since the pandemic, the food cost squeeze has been amplified due to supply chain issues and price spikes on staples such as cheese and flour. We present a local sampling of entrees broken down by costs to better understand the bang behind the buck.

by *Piet E. Jones* || Photos by *Justin Chesney*



### PEOPLE'S PIE

#### TOMATO PIE, \$12

Flour.....	85¢
Dough starter.....	50¢
Bianco DiNapoli tomatoes.....	55¢
Local tomatoes.....	\$2
Pimento cheese.....	\$1.20
Young pecorino.....	65¢
Seasoning.....	25¢
Pizza box.....	25¢
Prep labor.....	\$1.75

Total Food/Prep Cost  
**\$8**

**Food Cost 67%**

### THE MANTU

#### LAMB CHOPEN KEBAB, \$32

Rack of lamb.....	\$12
Onion, green and red pepper, garlic, purple cabbage.....	\$3
Cumin and sumac.....	50¢
Corn oil.....	50¢
Prep labor.....	\$1

Total Food/Prep Cost  
**\$17**

**Food Cost 53%**



### BRENNER PASS

#### FONDUE BURGER, \$16

House-made bun....	70¢
Seven Hills beef....	\$1.38
Fondue.....	\$1
Speck.....	14¢
Mayo.....	3¢
Dijon.....	6¢
Cornichon.....	3¢
Manakintowne Farms frisee.....	49¢
Potato.....	14¢
Prep labor.....	\$6.40

Total Food/Prep Cost  
**\$10.37**

**Food Cost 65%**



# \* SHOW ME \* THE MONEY

## THE RESTAURANT WORLD IS A GAME OF NUMBERS



### 30-30-30-10

A general rule of thumb when referring to restaurants' operating costs and profit margins.

30% labor  
30% food  
30% fixed costs  
10% profit



### PAY "THE MAN"

<b>7.5%</b> City of Richmond meals tax (1.5% dedicated to Richmond Public Schools)	<b>4%</b> Henrico County Meals Tax (all proceeds benefit Henrico County Public Schools)	<b>0%</b> Chesterfield County Meals Tax
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**\$35.5 M** || **\$41.8 M**

In the 2020 fiscal year (July 1-June 30), the city of Richmond collected \$35.5 million in meals tax, while in 2019, that figure was \$41.8 million.

*(At press time, the 2020 fiscal year did not include information for the month of June.)*

### INSIDER INSIGHT



"Little restaurants like us, we're not going to do crazy dollars, we don't do millions a year. I choose to make 10% profit or less if it means I pay my people better. To me, it's worth it. No one should rely on their restaurant being busy to make money. **It's taking care of your people 101.**"

—Donnie Glass, chef and co-owner of **Grisette**

"Once you start messing with the way their [servers] tips are done, they aren't going to make as much money. Today, a typical restaurant has about 70% of staff that are tipped employees, when you go from the \$2.13 per hour ... the whole way you run the restaurant has changed. It [tipped wages] doesn't need to be changed, there's no way to change to a European model, that's not the way [restaurants] are set up. **I think it would be devastating to the industry**, and I think you would see a lot of restaurant closures, and you would see a lot of people who look at it and go, 'I can't make my full-service restaurant work.'"

—Eric Terry, president of the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging and Travel Association

"We're building for the long haul and building a foundation [that is] less based on some tipped employees making \$300 a night and someone standing in the dish pit making \$75 after taxes. I think those days are gone. **We're in a shift on so many levels from protests to the pandemic, all these things are an opportunity to challenge these norms.** It's forced us to use our imagination and have deeper and more meaningful discussions about what it means to spend 40-plus hours of your life in a place."



—Patrick Phelan, chef and co-owner of **Longoven**

ILLUSTRATIONS: SAM GRAY; HEADSHOTS: FROM TOP: EILEEN MELLON; COURTESY SPROUTHOUSE

## TIPPING POINT

Tipping is one of the most ingrained components of dining out, often subsidizing the salaries of restaurant workers and making diners the driving force behind their wages. Employers are required to pay tipped employees only \$2.13 per hour, however, their wages including tips must equal the national minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour.



**THE NUMBERS GUY:** Russ McDowell has been working in restaurant finances for more than 30 years. To learn more, head to [richmondmag.com/mcdowell](http://richmondmag.com/mcdowell).

### THE GREAT DEBATE

In recent years, there has been an industrywide discussion with business owners and in government about the practice that was first introduced in the 18th century, looking toward a more European model that includes higher minimum wages, the elimination of tipping and/or the addition of service charges.



The original meaning of tip:  
**T.I.P. = TO INSURE  
PROMPTNESS**



### TO EACH THEIR OWN

Each restaurant pays its staff and allocates tips differently.

**GRISETTE:** Front-of-house and kitchen staff (minus owners) collectively work together on the floor and receive an hourly wage. Credit card tips are split among staff and included in their weekly paycheck. Cash tips are also split and distributed weekly.

**LAURA LEE'S, THE ROOSEVELT, GARNETT'S CAFE:** Tipped employees pool both credit card and cash tips. Credit card tips are paid through biweekly paychecks and cash tips split at the end of each shift.

**R & L HOSPITALITY GROUP:** Starting in September, tipped employees will pool all credit card and cash tips which will then be distributed in biweekly paychecks.

**THE BOATHOUSE/CASA DEL BARCO LOCATIONS:** FOH employees are paid an hourly wage, with a 20% service charge automatically included in the bill. If guests tip, the money is split among all employees.

### PROS OF TIPPING

- Lower operating costs for restaurants
- Earning flexibility for staff
- Encourages up-selling
- System restaurants were built upon

### CONS OF TIPPING

- Wage disparities between front-of-house and back-of-house employees
- Rooted in racism and sexism
- Inconsistent and sometimes inequitable income
- Competition among tipped employees

### TIPPED EMPLOYEE:

Someone who regularly receives more than \$30 per month in tips, often bartenders and servers in restaurants. The IRS suggests that tipped employees paid out at the end of each shift set aside 10% to 15% of their income each week for taxes.



### BANG FOR YOUR BOOZE

To sell alcohol, restaurants must apply for an on-premise Virginia ABC license.

### Annual License Fees

- Beer: **\$145**
- Wine and Beer: **\$300**
- Mixed Beverage (liquor, does not include wine and beer):  
1-100 seats = **\$560**, 101-150 seats = **\$975**, 151 or more = **\$1,430**



(During the pandemic, off-premise privileges have been temporarily granted.)





Protesters from the Black Lives Matter movement raise their fists in solidarity in front of the state Capitol. The night before, police tear-gassed a group of protesters at the Robert E. Lee monument.

PHOTO BY Nick Hancock

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# RISING FOR *justice*

Richmonders take to the streets to protest police brutality and demand racial equality

# Turning Point

AS OFFICIALS SEEK TO TAKE DOWN RICHMOND'S CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT WILL DETERMINE THE LASTING IMPACT OF THEIR REMOVAL

BY Rodrigo Ariazza

**N**ightly demonstrations against racial inequities and police brutality in Richmond have underscored an urgent need for change in the city, and state and local leaders are responding with a clear message: It is time for Monument Avenue's Confederate statues to come down.

Six days after protests broke out in Richmond in the wake of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, Gov. Ralph Northam directed his Department of General Services to remove, "as soon as possible," the 12-ton bronze statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee that has towered above the historic thoroughfare since 1890. At press time, however, three lawsuits had been filed seeking to thwart the monument's removal. Suits filed by William C. Gregory and Henrico resident William Davis argue that removal would violate language in the deed the state

signed to gain control over the monument alongside federally designated landmark law, according to Richmond Circuit and U.S. District court records. A group of Monument Avenue residents — who filed a lawsuit anonymously, with the exception of Helen Marie Taylor — argue its removal would hurt their property values and tax benefits.

Richmond had been barred from altering or removing its Confederate statues until the General Assembly ceded control over the monuments to local governments earlier this year. Mayor Levar Stoney committed to joining 9th District City Councilman Michael Jones in putting forth an ordinance to remove the city-owned Confederate memorials lining Monument Avenue when the new legislation takes effect on July 1. All nine members of City Council have expressed their support for the measure.

But while city leaders prepare for the legislative pro-

cess to get underway, Richmonders have taken matters into their own hands. During demonstrations in early June, protesters set fire to and toppled a Christopher Columbus monument in Byrd Park before tossing it into nearby Fountain lake and tore down the Jefferson Davis statue on Monument Avenue a day later. In tweets following those actions, Stoney condemned the glorification of both historical figures but said protesters should wait for statues to be removed safely by professionals.

The five Confederate memorials lining Monument Avenue have become raw nerves at the city's center, sparking debate between groups who call them an essential reminder of Richmond's history and others who view the statues as shameful tributes to white supremacy and the Confederacy's Lost Cause narrative.

During the announcement that he would order removal of the Lee monument,

Northam stressed that the issue is clear-cut: "In Virginia, we no longer preach a false version of history, one that pretends the Civil War was about state rights and not the evils of slavery," he said, citing his authority over the Lee statue because it sits on state-owned land. "Yes, that statue has been there for a long time, but it was wrong then and it is wrong now. So, we're taking it down."

In the days following Northam's order, Lee Circle at times felt more like a block party than a solemn reminder of Richmond's days as the capital of the Confederacy. On a recent Sunday afternoon, music blared as tents along the grassy median offered free snacks and drinks for groups planning to attend protests later that day. Onlookers climbed onto the statue's pedestal, snapping photos of spray-painted messages that now adorn it.

Brian Jackson, 22, carried a protest sign as he took in the

A group gathers at the Robert E. Lee Monument.



scene, sharing that Northam's announcement proved to him that demonstrations can make a difference. "[Removing the statues has] been something we've been talking about for a while now, and to see it come true, it brought a smile to my face," he says.

Councilman Jones, who has advocated for local control over the city's Confederate monuments since 2017, says it will take years for Richmond to unravel systems that uphold white supremacist ideals, but that scrubbing Confederate icons from their pedestals is a needed first step.

"I don't think they should be lifted up in the way that they are," Jones says. "Take them off their pedestals, put them down somewhere, preserve a piece of history, but you choose which part of your history you're going to lift up."

He adds, however, that "the

message of force and violence [perpetrated by] the police [against African Americans] cannot be lost" amid renewed focus on the monuments.

The question surrounding the monuments then becomes: Where will they go next?

**"THIS IS A CRITICAL MOMENT, BUT IT'S THE BEGINNING AND NOT THE END OF A CRITICAL MOMENT."**

Julian Hayter  
UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LEADERSHIP STUDIES

Northam says the Lee statue will be stored in a warehouse until an appropriate resting site is determined, while City Council would have 30 days to offer the other monuments to any museum, historical society or military battlefield after removing them.

University of Richmond Associate Professor of Leadership Studies Julian Hayter served on the city's Monument Avenue Commission, which recommended in 2018 that the city allow the majority of the Confederate statues remain, with additional context. He urges city leaders to find a home for the statues where they can be recontextualized to address head-on false historical narratives surrounding the Confederacy.

"I still think that if those monuments come down and there is no attempt in Richmond or the commonwealth to deal with the legacy of the Lost Cause, this is a waste, an absolute waste," he says. "It's a symbolic political victory at best. At worst, it is cynical politicking. You can't do away with those ideas by locking up Confederate statuary in a warehouse. They have to be used as

teachable moments."

One possible home for the statues: The Valentine. Its CEO, Bill Martin, says the museum would be interested in joining the conversation as city leaders weigh options, though he adds it's too early to say how many statues the museum could take in and how they'd be displayed.

Wherever they land, Hayter says that to create lasting change, city leaders will need to heal deeper wounds left by Richmond's Confederate past.

"This is a critical moment, but it's the beginning and not the end of a critical moment," he says. "There are still artifacts of the Jim Crow system in Richmond, like the public school system [and] the compression of poor African American communities into public housing. These are still problems left over from the racist and segregationist policies in the 20th century, and taking those monuments down is not going to fix those problems." ■

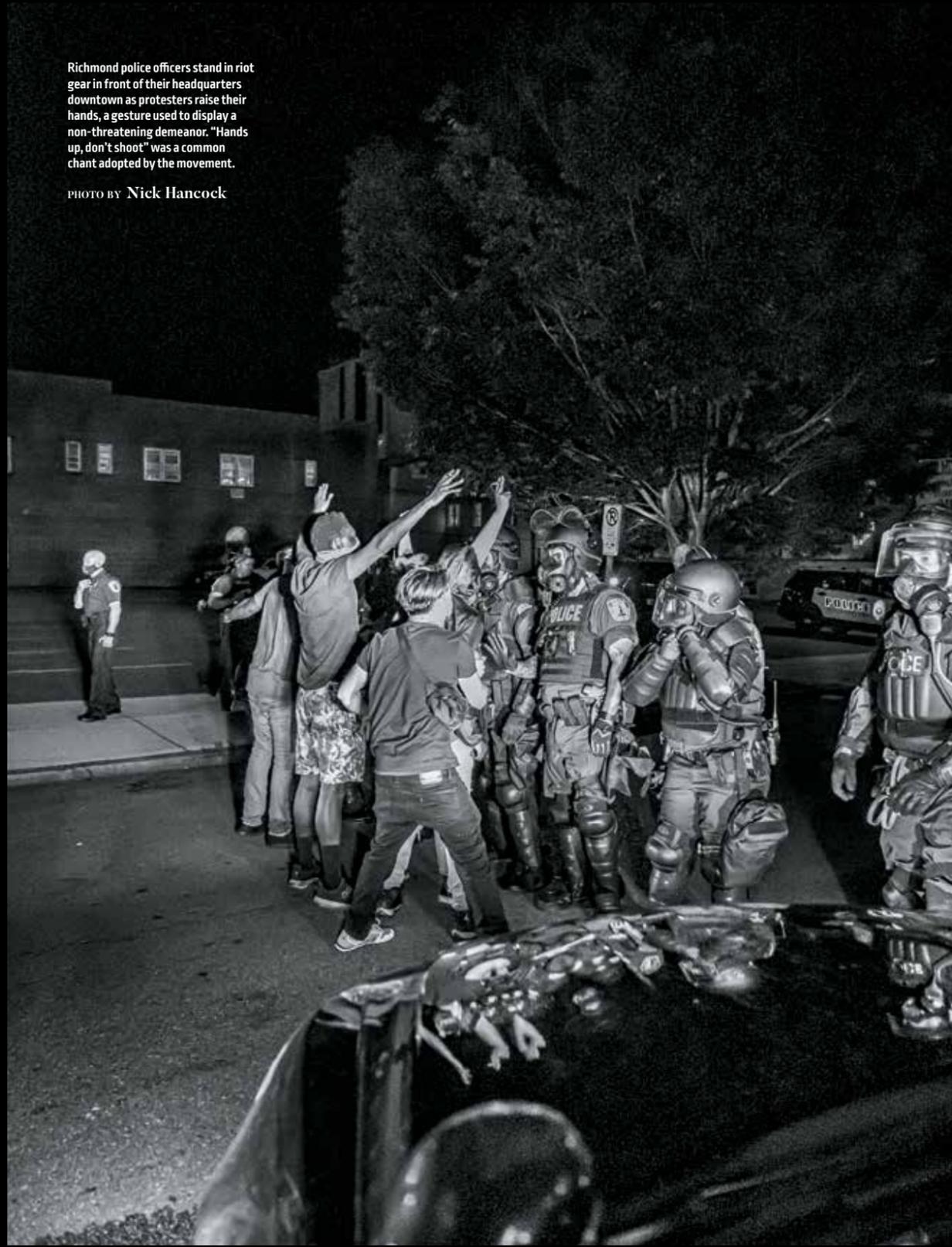
Crowds march through the city during a daytime Black Lives Matter protest. Says photographer Eric Foster, "It definitely hits home when people mention history, because my folks come from Alabama and a lot of them marched in Selma. ... it's the same issue, but 50, 60, 70 years later."

PHOTO BY Eric Foster



Richmond police officers stand in riot gear in front of their headquarters downtown as protesters raise their hands, a gesture used to display a non-threatening demeanor. "Hands up, don't shoot" was a common chant adopted by the movement.

PHOTO BY Nick Hancock





**“WHEN WE WERE PEACEFUL, THEY DIDN’T UNDERSTAND US. WHEN WE SPOKE OUR WORDS, THEY DIDN’T UNDERSTAND US. BUT WHEN WE WALK THE STREETS, THEY UNDERSTAND US. SO, WE NOT STOPPING.”**

## Natalie Andre

A VIRGINIA UNION UNIVERSITY STUDENT WHO IS ACTIVE IN THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

I live by faith. The higher power’s been leading me. I’m not a person who sticks in the back. I’m here to speak for the people. My motivation is the fact that I’m black and I’m living in America, that was built off of slaves, that was built off of black people. And that’s not right. When you look at the system now, there’s two types: one for white people, one for black people. How many lives do you want? How many riots do you want? How many protests do you want? When does it

stop? The crime is cops tear-gassing people, spitting on people, driving into crowds and running them over. That is a crime. There’s so much more that needs to be done. We are not stopping until we see action because everybody’s good for talking, but too many promises have been made in the past, and nothing has changed. When we were peaceful, they didn’t understand us. When we spoke our words, they didn’t understand us. But when we walk the streets, they understand us. So, we not stopping. — AS TOLD TO Cameron Oglesby

JAY PAUL



Enjoli Moon (right) and her son, Jonah Hodari, 16

## ENJOLI MOON

Founder, Afrikana Independent Film Festival and assistant curator of film and special programs, Virginia Commonwealth University’s Institute for Contemporary Art

As a Richmond native, I am overwhelmed with pride for my city right now. We have evolved a great deal over the last 20 years, but what is happening now is a paradigm shift. A deliberate departure from business as usual — business that has traditionally held space for racist ideologies in the name of history. There’s no room for that as we move forward. We’re witnessing community power in action, dismantling statues and statutes that no longer serve us. It’s empowering to see this work being done, and although we’re not on the front lines with them, my family and I stand in solidarity with those out there with

their boots on the ground. They represent generations that have fought for true freedom and equity in our country, and we support this work. [Gov. Ralph Northam’s] decision [to remove the Robert E. Lee monument] is long overdue. I agree that all symbols that give reverence to this country’s racist history should be removed and destroyed. But that is not the end goal — change must come in institutional policies and individual behaviors that affirm the value of black lives and dismantle systemic racism. That’s what this is really about. — AS TOLD TO Carol A.O. Wolf

## MARCUS INGRAM

Photographer who took the first photos of Ava Holloway and Kennedy George dancing on the Lee statue

I’ve been a photographer for about nine or 10 years. Holloway’s mother reached out to ask if I would take the photos. I thought it was an opportunity to tell the story from my own perspective. I work on Broad Street, so I’ve taken photos of everything from boarding up the store, Utmost, to the guys at Round Two cleaning up after looting to the protests and the ballerinas. Ballerinas are strong, but what they do is also very delicate. I think the picture almost shows a form of hope. If anything, I’d want people to take away that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, that light being a good thing. From what the

protesters are doing and everything happening, there will be a change. Whether it’s big or small, there will be change. Things will be changed. I want to show that part of the movement — more soft, but also still powerful. For me, I didn’t really like the looting side of the protests. I’m all for the protests and back the movement 100 percent, but I wanted to show something more peaceful. Every cause that every protester is fighting for, all of it, hopefully there will be a solution, and things will change for the better. People really want that statue down, and I’m all for it. Why would you want



FROM TOP: JAY PAUL; COURTESY MARCUS INGRAM



your city to be represented by that? Those two girls? Low-key, they’re the next generation. They’re going to be a part of a new generation of things, and God-speed that — it’s way better than what anyone before them had to experience. — AS TOLD TO Eileen Mellon



A sea of protesters departs the state Capitol and defies the city-wide curfew, blocking traffic along West Broad Street.

PHOTO BY Eric Foster



A massive bonfire illuminates the intersection of North Henry and West Broad streets as protesters demonstrated into the early hours of Sunday, May 31.

PHOTO BY Eric Foster

## YEWANDE AUSTIN

Founder, Global Institute for Diversity and Change

**Structural racism** is very complex in that it is woven throughout every part of society: education, health care, housing and job opportunities. The uprising we are witnessing right now is not happening because of new issues — we have been fighting these battles for 400 years — but America has decided that small changes are no longer acceptable. America has reached a definitive tipping point.

I'm not surprised to see these issues surface over and over again. As Americans, we're really good at putting Band-Aids on issues and acting like the problem has been solved. Band-Aids are only designed to temporarily cover a wound while it heals. Racism is a cancer that has never been healed.

So, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and countless other victims are like a scab that is peeled off every single time we witness one of our brothers and sisters dying at the hands of professionals whom we hired to protect us. We hurt. We bleed. We're enraged.

My hope for the city of Richmond is that we invite more people with different experiences to participate in safe conversations that inspire sustainable solutions. In the midst of our pain, sometimes I fear that we lose allies that could help

**“AMERICA HAS REACHED A DEFINITIVE TIPPING POINT.”**



advance our mission when they're told “how” to respond to injustice. In order to achieve inclusive excellence, we can no longer afford to treat diversity like a check-off box. I challenge the leadership of this great city to make Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and anti-racism education a higher priority in times of peace, not just in times of conflict.

— AS TOLD TO Jessica Ronky Haddad

FROM TOP: COURTESY YEWANDE AUSTIN; JAY PAUL

## ELIZABETH RICE

Civil rights activist, member of The Richmond 34 and founder of BPOS (Be Part of the Solution) Foundation Inc.

I come from a family of civil rights activists. In 1960, I was a student at Virginia Union University. Martin Luther King Jr. used to come there and speak, and sometimes I would introduce him.

Over the past weeks [of protests], I've had tears, I've had anger, some joy and some hope. In 1960, you had mainly a black crowd out there trying to get things done and get people organized to

say, “Look, we're human beings, just like you.” This moment, this movement, has been so inspirational. People of all colors and denominations have locked hands in this protest about police brutality and people who have not been given a fair chance. All I'm asking for is an equal seat at the table. Allow me to be me, and you to be you. But don't deny me being me because you have the privilege of being you.

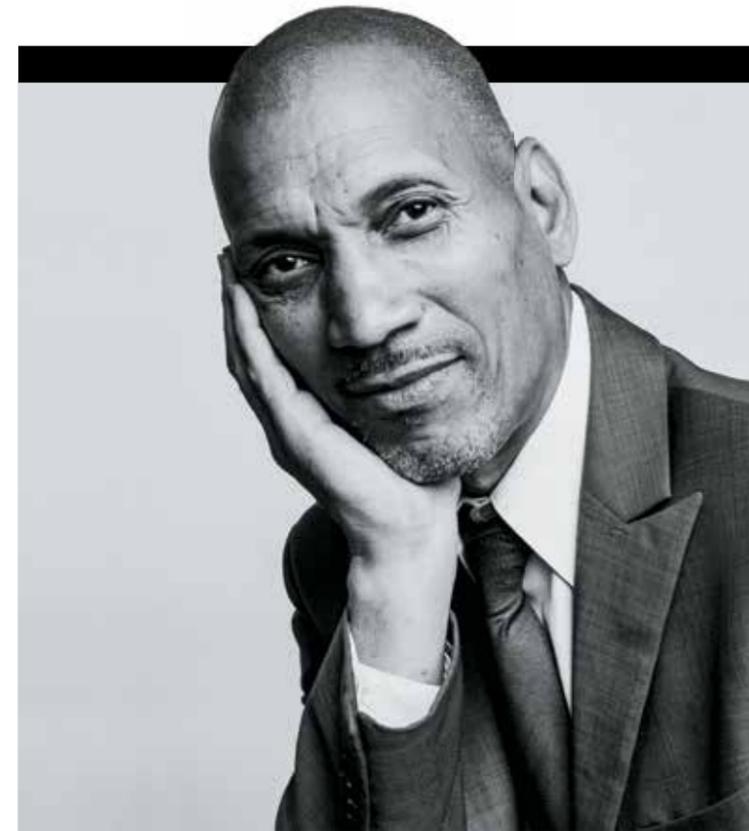
I've been wanting to have a forum with the governor on racism at colleges and high schools to discuss this thing, make some changes and make this day a better day for everybody. I think the governors and mayors really need to come together and institute some



restructuring and reforming. This is a time for reconciliation. People from all backgrounds need to be included in this dialogue. And not just talk, we've had enough talk. We need some action. We have to come together in unity. We are trying to heal the soul of America.

— AS TOLD TO E.M

FROM TOP: COURTESY RAM BHAGAT; JAY PAUL



## Ram Bhagat

MANAGER, SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE STRATEGY, RICHMOND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**W**e are in the midst of a trauma tsunami. The pandemic revealed that longstanding health disparities are an issue in America.

We already knew that. Richmond particularly had this great illumination when almost 100% of deaths from COVID-19 were African Americans. Why was that? It's one of the questions we have to tackle as a community. There are no easy answers.

We must do a thorough investigation. We must do community-based healing in small groups so we can explore our common ex-

periences around trauma. I think it would go a long way towards healing and rebuilding our communities, to understand the root causes of racism and its legacy. All of us are affected by this because it's in our cultural waters, like Flint, Michigan. It's in the air like radon gas.

We must build trust. You can't just go into a conversation about racism or work around racism if there's no trust. It's not going to be comfortable. We also need to look at how to start working on ourselves. Then there's the big question of justice. How are we going to achieve justice?

At that point we get to acknowledgment — acknowledging the harm, accepting responsibility — then we can start to figure out how we can move forward. But we're not ready to move forward yet because we don't have the tools yet.

There is hope in this. And the hope is honest opportunity for progress to emerge. That's hope.

— AS TOLD TO Susan W. Morgan

## AMIA GRAHAM

Valedictorian, Thomas Jefferson High School

**THE FIRST TIME I REALIZED I WAS BLACK AND THE EFFECT IT WOULD HAVE ON MY LIFE,**

I was in the fifth grade. Trayvon Martin had just been murdered, and when I looked at his picture on the television, I could see my older cousin in him. I looked at my parents, and they just shook their heads and told me to sit down because we needed to talk. My whole viewpoint on the world changed that night. Up until this point, I had only heard of racism in my history class, and I never fathomed anything like that could happen during my lifetime. Since the young age of 11, I have been forced to see people that look like me murdered in the streets like animals, yet the real animals went home to their families and kissed their children goodnight.

I am angry. I am tired. I am hurt. And I can't breathe. I am filled with fear every time I see a cop on the road, but when I see my people protesting and chanting “Black Lives Matter,” I am filled with unimaginable joy and pride because MY LIFE MATTERS, and so do the lives of every black person on this planet. Until that singular fact is acknowledged, nothing will change.

— EXCERPT FROM PERSONAL REFLECTION ESSAY





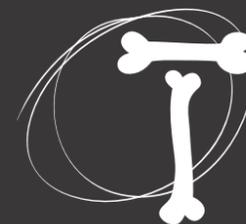
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Door-PRIZE: \$50 CERTIFICATE

**Exile, the shop of trash culture necessities and 'rock 'n' roll rags and jewelry,' filled a niche in customers' closets and lives**

by Harry Kollatz Jr.



The sign in front of Exile depicted a heart on one side and on the other, a brain. A visitor to the 822 W. Grace St. shop read the symbols and informed owner Mimi Regelson, "I get it. 'Open heart, open mind,'" she recalls. "And that wasn't intentional. But if I had a really

good exchange with the person, and they left without buying anything, I felt that I had profited."

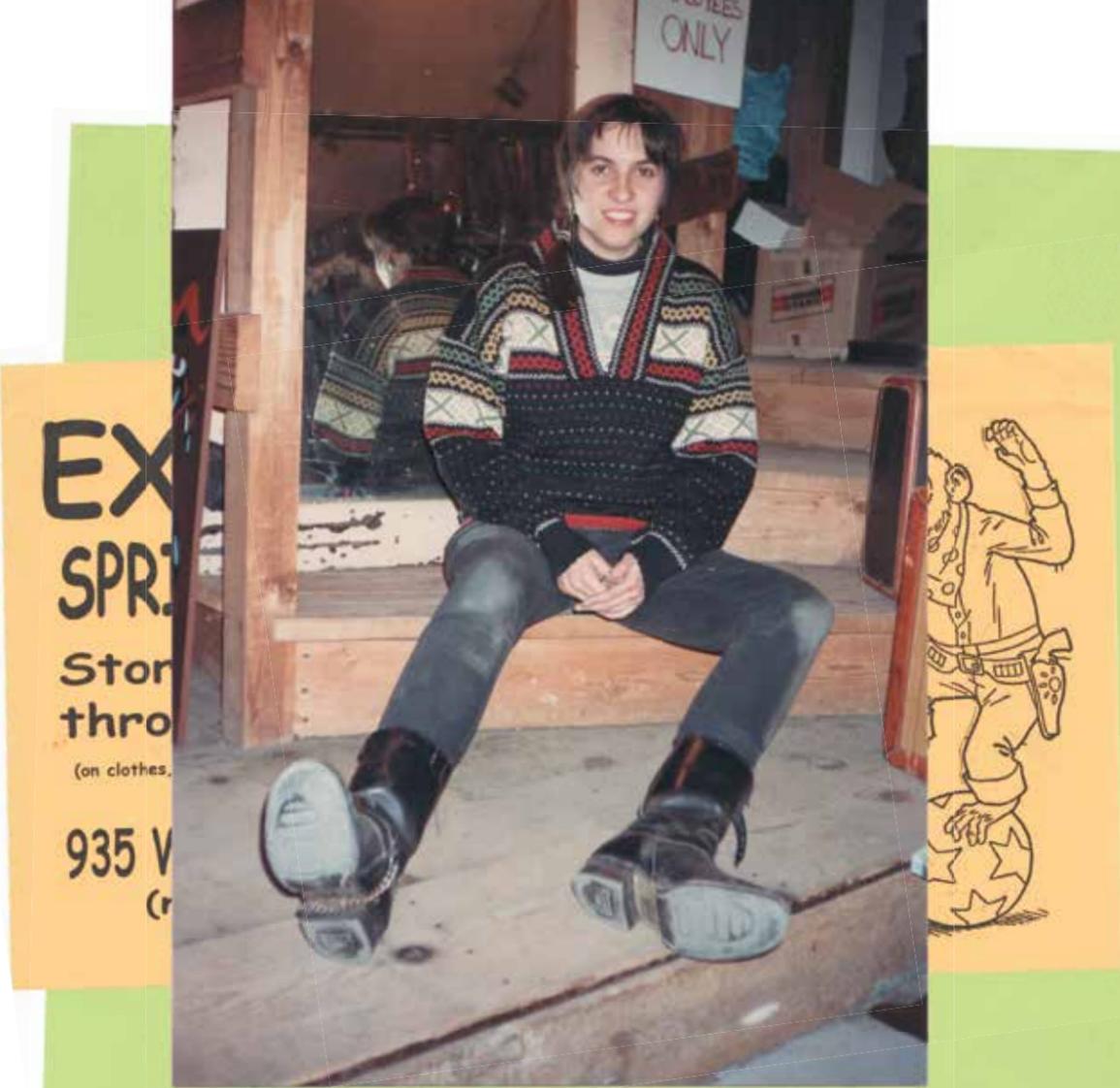
Exile was where a generation of Virginia Commonwealth University students, musicians, artists and the fashion-forward bought their first Doc Martens, discovered Manic Panic hair dye and chose body jewelry. Prior to social media, Exile served as a gathering place. People stopped by to say hello, catch up, "and leave an hour later with a supply of merchandise," remembers artist Melissa Burgess, "like socks, or a belt, or a most extraordinary vintage sweater. There was always the perfect antique treasure." Besides the advertised "rock 'n' roll rags and jewelry," Exile also hosted art exhibitions and performances.

The shop grew into a "combination of an art project and a community center," Regelson says. "It was definitely a store for the misfit toys. As far as being a successful business model, it really wasn't."

Though Exile has been gone since 2011, its spirit lives.

Lauren Healy-Flora came to Richmond to attend Virginia Commonwealth University in 1998. She describes discovering the jam-packed shop-in-a-house as a rite of passage. "Going in there was like therapy," she says. She became a fashion photography stylist (sometimes working for Richmond magazine) and often used clothing and accessories from Exile. She formed an enduring friendship with Regelson.

Today, Healy-Flora operates Blue Bones Vintage with her husband, Jeremy Flora, at 310 N. Laurel St., around the corner from the now-vanished Exile site. Regelson works for Blue Bones, hunting down vintage wares. "Mimi's my only buyer," Healy-Flora says. "That seat's taken." >



Mimi Regelson at Exile's second location at 822 W. Grace St. For the record: She never wore Doc Martens.

Gabora (named for a side-show character), poses by the Exile sidewalk sign. The shop's pit bull was later featured in a short film by Mark Brown, "Gabora vs. Godzilla."



## Setting up Shop



In the mid-1980s, at age 30, Richmond native Regelson was living in New York, running the office for a managing editor at the publisher Avon and then Warner Books in Manhattan, when she began to tire of her harried life.

"I was overworked and not earning enough," she recalls. "And I started thinking, 'Why am I living in the city when I'm too tired or too busy to enjoy it?'"

Thus, she and her then-partner Charlie Ilario, who worked in vintage stores and collected clothing and records, moved back to her hometown, the more affordable Richmond, to open a shop expressing their mutual interests in clothing, music and subculture, ranging from rockabilly to GWAR, and from screwball comedy films to the transgressive B-movies of Troma Entertainment.

Regelson's mother, Sylvia, owned Ouroboros Art Pottery & African Arts in Mechanicsville's Antique Village, which she still operates today at age 94, going in two days a week (down from her pre-pandemic six).

Ilario, who was "a rabid Rolling Stones fan," as Regelson recalls, thought the name "Exile" was a natural fit, given the store's first location at 1309 W. Main St. and the Stones' 1972 album "Exile on Main Street," as well as the couple's relocation from New York. Regelson didn't share the Stones' affection, but she adds, "I later married a Tibetan in exile, so it seemed more appropriate."

On a hot afternoon in August 1986, Burgess and her friend Matt Linkous, lured by the open door through which wafted Johnny Thunders' music, became the first customers to cross Exile's threshold. Burgess bought a riveted leather men's watchband that she still has today.

Through the years, she made numerous purchases at Exile: vintage sweaters, a giant taxidermy barracuda, a folk-art model of the Hotel John Marshall that lights up. "You never knew what you'd find," she says.

Regelson and Ilario set up shop in the Caribbean-colored Uptown, a rising commercial district near VCU, but during the first six months, the shop suffered four break-ins. Replacing the shattered display window exceeded the shop's minuscule budget, which led them to board it up instead. That made the store look as if it were closed, until artist David B. Frye came along to find Regelson distraught about the situation. He offered to paint the boards and turned it into an art installation, using black tape to make the image of a car battery in the corner with the name "EXILE."

"So it looks really punk rock," Frye recalls.

The bands Mudd Helmut, Ten Ten and Sexabilly Avalanche performed benefit concerts for Exile at The Pyramid Club and other venues. Regelson worked three temp jobs and slept on the store's floor to make ends meet.

Despite the damages to the store, rent came due, and the general feeling Regelson received from the building's owner was that Exile needed to move on.

## Larger Than Life



Opening in its second location at 822 W. Grace St. in 1987, Exile blossomed amid the vegetarian Grace Place restaurant, the big green jutting box of Don's Hot Nuts, the final screenings at the Biograph Theatre and the complexities of a neighborhood adjacent to an expanding VCU.

It's the location Regelson on occasion

finds herself dreaming about. "It's the store, and I'm running it in some fashion, but it's a labyrinth," she says.

Which makes dream sense, considering the plethora of stories and larger-than-life characters from this period: Gustave Heiss (1941-2015), he of the great-

"You never knew what you'd find."

— Melissa Burgess, Exile's first customer and longtime shopper

er than 6-foot stature, stentorian voice and dramatic mien, often hefting a briefcase full of sketches and notes, a beloved member of the extended Exile cast who for years took out the trash for a dollar; the bands rehearsing in the basement; the shop dogs: a one-eyed Husky named Bosco (whose howling from the bottom of an unknown 25-foot well beneath a Fourth Street porch brought rescue and ultimately adoption by Regelson) and the small pit bull Gabora, devourer of bubbles and destroyer of recyclable cardboard; and the store's curtained display cabinet containing a stuffed and mounted cat that, despite a written warning, startled some visitors.

The upstairs gallery of art and music, curated in part by Snakehandlers and Useless Playboys musician Jonny Cecka (1963-2017), offered intriguing counterculture presentations, including "GWART," the first exhibition of props and costumes from the shock-trauma rock-opera art >



Regelson in front of Exile at 822 W. Grace St. The building was demolished as VCU took over the block around 2009.



collective GVAR. In alternative culture periodical *Throttle* (1981-1999), writer Jimmy Blackford noted how at the show's December 1990 opening, GVAR member Beefcake the Mighty smote a protesting "nun" and "priest" to lampoon *Style Weekly's* refusal to cover the event "because it wasn't art."

In May 1991 came "War Peaces," inspired by the Persian Gulf War, the last major exhibition of the Urban Artists Amalgamated collective (1987-1991). The opening featured a performance by musician/choreographer Robbie Kinter and dancer/writer Cheryl Pallant.

The February 1993 "Heartbreak" show was a dark take on Valentine's Day, with the work of 18 artists, among them Michael Clautice, Georgia Myers and Fred Weatherford, as well as Lorianne Ellison (1958-2015), who went on to national exhibitions. Visitors wrote their anonymous stories of love gone wrong in "The Book of Heartbreak." Paul Teeples' aptly named "Hammer a Nail" invited visitors to do just that into a heart figure.

Former Exile employee Margaret Reed, now a Social Security claims attorney, recalls how during store hours, guests went up to the gallery, "and they

stayed a long time, writing their tale of heartbreak, and then you'd hear the banging of the hammer."

Downstairs, shoppers might find a midcentury modern lamp and multitiered lampshades, silk smoking jackets, gowns that women wore in silent films, studded leather jackets, kitten heel pumps, biker jewelry, an anatomy chart, an alligator purse and vintage pinup postcards. Reed keeps one of these postcards on her desk today. It depicts a woman on the beach holding a fan of playing cards across her presumably bare chest. "Tame by today's standards," she says with a chuckle.

COURTESY MIMI REGELSON; INSET: ERIC SMITH



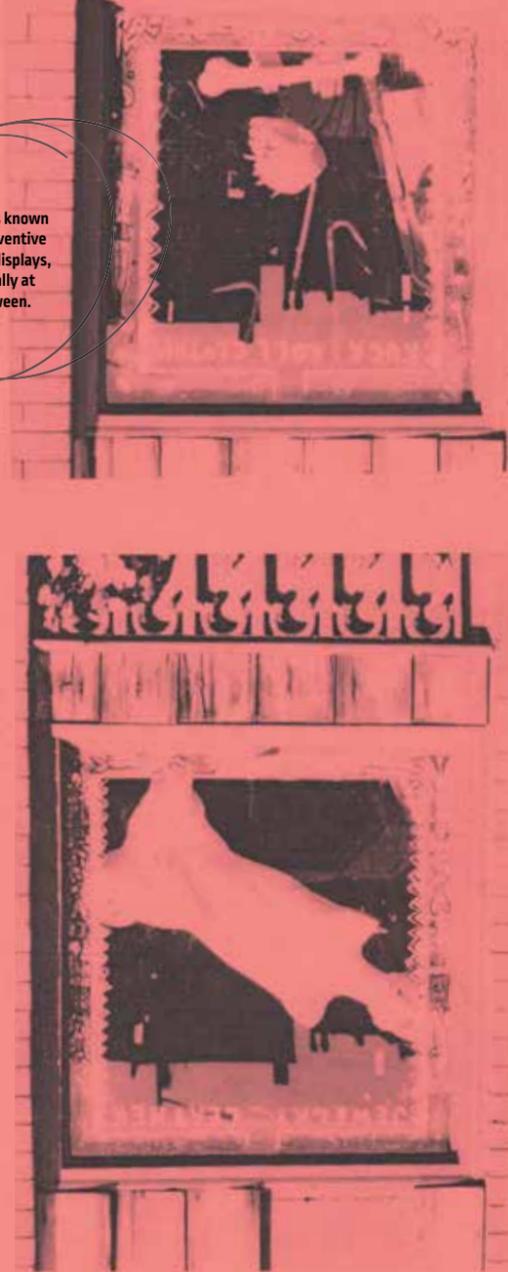
Gustave Heiss, an anchor member of the shop's repertory characters, posed for a February 1992 fashion spread in *Circuit* magazine. He took out the shop's trash each day for \$1.

## Doc Martens, Manic Panic and Pierced Nipples

Exile rummaged about in the past while also looking into the streets of the day, which made customers of not only skate rats and rockers but also every variety of the curious. Potential shoplifters, however, may have hesitated when they spotted an effigy head alongside a sign threatening a karmic curse for their misdeed.

COURTESY MIMI REGELSON

Exile was known for its inventive window displays, especially at Halloween.



The store became a go-to for film and television productions and touring bands. Courtney Love was apparently rude there, and nobody remembers what she bought. A pair of vintage bifocals fascinated Billy Bragg. Marilyn Manson's retinue, without the performer, prowled the shop. They took pleasure in using the Manson company card for their purchases. Exile employees were seldom star-struck because, whether celebrity or counter clerk, they all worked in the circus.

Betty Migliaccio, today an EMT and firefighter, helmed the store's counter

from 1992 to 1997. She describes how customers seized upon a fresh batch of Doc Martens. "We'd receive a shipment and then not get one for eight months," due to customs issues, she says.

Exile stopped selling Docs about 15 years in, when the manufacturer, Air-Wair USA, started making the boots in China. The company, says Regelson, dropped longtime distributors that had popularized the brand to cut better deals with chain stores.

Regelson also fielded occasional calls from parents who were exasperated by brightly colored Manic Panic hair dyes. >

From Whiting's she also bought period World of Mirth posters to hang in the new toy shop to provide a thematic unity for the space.

World of Mirth opened above Exile on Aug. 6, 1993 — the same day a tornado ripped through Petersburg and Colonial Heights. After two and a half years Harvey went out on her own, opening World of Mirth at 2925 W. Cary St. on April 1, 1996.

Regelson soon opened Exile Upstairs, a showroom for vintage furniture and housewares from the 1940s to 1970s, along with contemporary furnishings by regional artists. She took pleasure in the arranging.

"She put stuff together in a way that you'd say, 'I want this whole room!'" former employee Reed recalls.

Regelson and Ilario parted ways romantically and professionally about a year after moving Exile to Grace Street, and Ilario went on to cut hair at Pine Street Barber Shop. They remained friends, however, and Ilario's daughter, Maria, grew up in Exile and enjoyed being a store kid.

Now a Brooklyn-based archivist and collections manager for an artist's estate, she muses, "Growing up there was tremendous. I was so young, and I may have taken for granted how cool it was. Mimi is so much about inclusion and community. It's so ingrained in me. Even though I was tiny, I was a part of it. It wasn't like hanging out with my parents' friends."

Maria accompanied her father for frequent drop-ins (her mother worked at Grace Place). Her first lunchbox came from World of Mirth upstairs. She walked shop dogs Bosco and Gabora, and she'd take naps curled up in the large bookshelves used for displaying sweaters. She'd get nervous scotching through the eerie mannequin storage to the rat-motif bathroom.

At age 16, she started assisting with the theatrical window displays. "Exile was a constantly growing art installa-

tion rather than a store," she says.

Exile, through its advertising, underwrote art, street and film festivals, and music events, and in 1993 the store hosted a benefit to aid the owners of the arson-destroyed Kokopelli club by displaying "strange and twisted artifacts" pulled from the wreckage.

The shop likewise supported the late-1990s Capital City Barn Dance with its programs designed by musician Wes Freed. (In 2019, a collection of Freed's work was published as "The Art of Wes Freed: Paintings, Posters, Pin-Ups & Possums.")

"My thinking is that if you think you're cool, you're not cool."

— Exile Owner Mimi Regelson

## The Final Years

Both Regelson and her brother held positions in Grace Street's neighborhood and business association as the group attempted to negotiate a period of transition along Grace Street with VCU gobbling up entire blocks — including the 800 block. The sale of 822 W. Grace precipitated the store's third and final move down the street to 935 W. Grace St. in 2006.

At this location, employee and artist Noah Scalin launched his Skull-a-Day creative project, making skull forms out of everyday objects, which he documented

on a blog that later turned into a book.

A dinosaur head was mounted on a wall as though it were a big game trophy.

Sarah Callaway worked as Exile's last employee, and she recalls the early 2000s as a daunting and stressful time for Grace Street. "Mimi was such a mother to so many people," she says. "That place was amazing. It praised avant-garde creativity."

During the 1990s, the 800-900 blocks of West Grace had boasted more than 30 independent businesses. The extent of the subsequent university-driven and chain-brand alterations made the area nearly unrecognizable to those who knew the street in its livelier and grittier days.

During the store's final years, Regelson found herself again facing a demanding schedule that afforded her time for little else — she was in the same situation that prompted her departure from New York. She muses, "I thought the longer I did it, the easier it would get."

The street-culture milieu that the shop supported and celebrated became more diffuse and accessible through other means — like the Internet. "Exile had run its course," Regelson says. "It was the only one of its kind for a long time."

In 2011, the store closed with a clearance sale of everything down to the fixtures after 24 1/2 years in business.

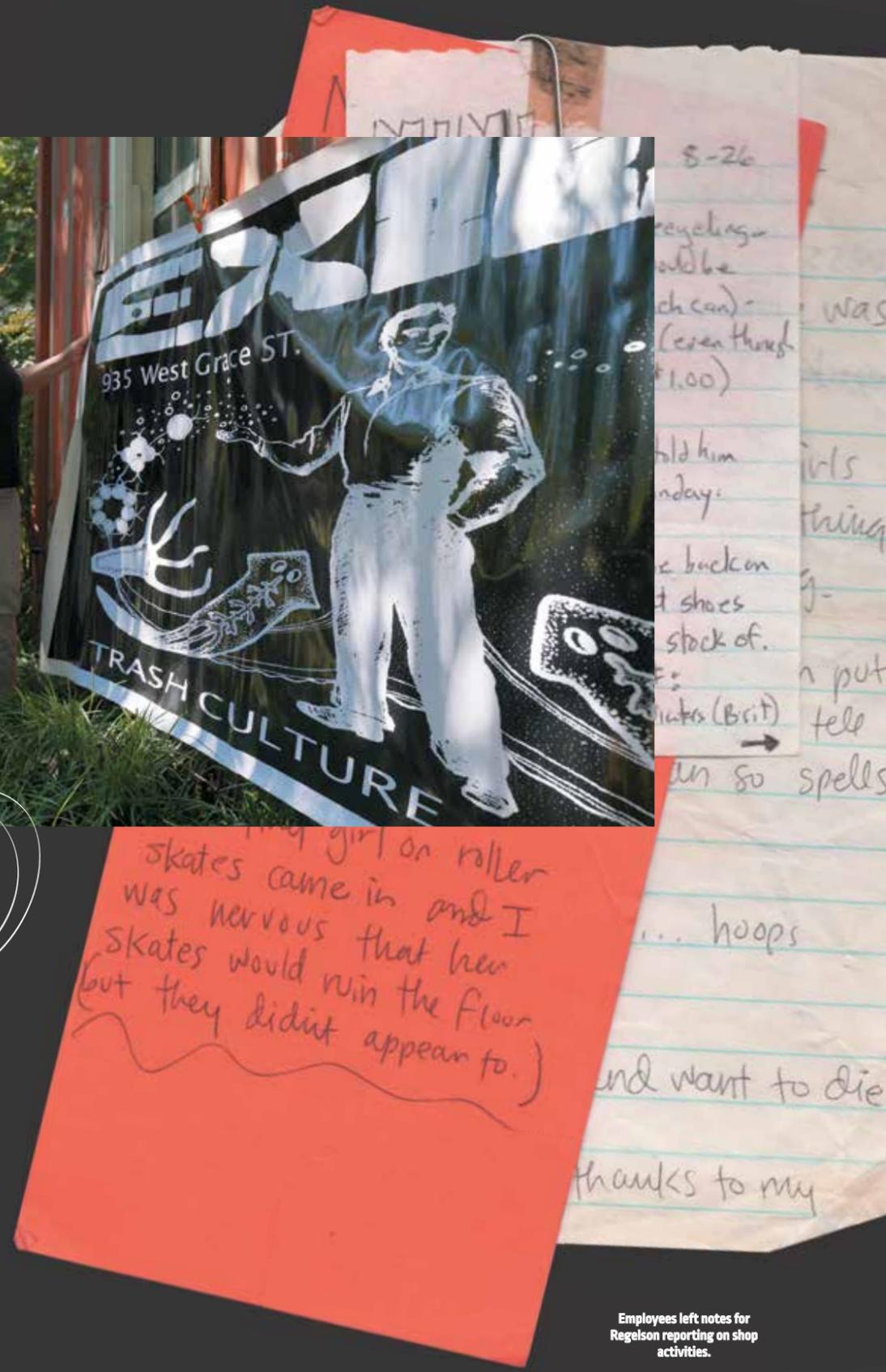
That half-year resembles how a phonograph needle is lifted from a record to play the music on the other side, rather than an end. But ends came: Gustave Heiss died at age 73 in 2015, Ilario at age 62 in April 2020.

"The funny thing about it is, people came to us like we were cool," Regelson says, laughing. "We were the uncoolest in school, the rejects. My thinking is that if you think you're cool, you're not cool."

Dugan responds that although Regelson may think she was uncool, "She had fantastic taste, always looked great, and was very kind. What more to cool is there?" ☐



Mimi Regelson, today, poses with a banner that hung in Exile's last location.



Employees left notes for Regelson reporting on shop activities.