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Pages 7-10

CHESTERFIELD

Observer

VOLUME 25, NUMBER 41 | YOUR COUNTY NEWSPAPER SINCE 1995 | CHESTERFIELD.OBSERVER.COM | OCTOBER 14, 2020

County floats funding for new ballpark

Casey: New stadium for Squirrels hinges on city support for Henricus park

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

As it encourages Richmond to invest in shared regional amenities, Chesterfield County is dangling a carrot that has been on the city's wish list for nearly two decades: funding for a new baseball stadium to replace The Diamond.

Chesterfield wants Richmond to join it and Henrico County as an equal partner in the operation of Henricus Historical Park, a living history museum located within the county's Dutch Gap Conservation Area. In return, Chesterfield has offered to help pay for a ballpark that would be used by both the Richmond Flying Squirrels and Virginia Commonwealth University.

The proposed quid pro quo was briefly outlined in a July 22 letter from Chesterfield County Administrator Joe Casey to the Board of Supervisors, a copy of which was recently obtained by the Observer.

"The county will continue to pursue broader participation at Henricus and other Chesterfield entities as economic conditions normalize," Casey wrote in the 18-page document, which he presented to the five-member board at the end of fiscal year 2020 as a status update on local priorities.

"Monies don't just flow one way anymore in this region," he said in a recent interview. "The standing offer [to the city], if you will, is if you want to be serious about a baseball stadium as part of a regional partnership, you also need to be serious about something that serves the region in Henricus."

Jim Nolan, press secretary for Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, didn't respond to a request for comment by the Observer's press team

See **BALLPARK** on page 5



A SIGN OF THE TIMES

Local "Green Book" motel was a haven for Black travelers during the Jim Crow era. Soon, the site may again serve people in need

BY RICH GRISET STAFF WRITER

Rusted and weather-beaten, the old motel sign stood on Jefferson Davis Highway for more than half a century.

With its neon lettering broken and its original dark green paint faded to somewhere between sea green and gunmetal gray, the sign had clearly seen better days before its removal earlier this year. Reading "Colbrook Motel," it stood as a beacon for Black motorists seeking safe refuge prior to desegregation. The motel, one of the few places in Chesterfield where Black travelers could spend the night, opened

COURTESY OF
SUSAN HELLMAN

One of the few places Black travelers could stay overnight in Chesterfield during the Jim Crow era, the former Colbrook Motel on U.S. Route 1 is slated to become a new affordable housing community.

in 1946, more than a decade before Interstate 95 overtook U.S. Route 1 as the primary way to traverse the East Coast.

During the era of Jim Crow, a system of local and state laws that enforced racial segregation in the United States, the Colbrook Motel was the lone Chesterfield business highlighted in "The Negro Motorist Green Book," a national reference guide that listed Black-friendly establishments. As bus and train travel at the time

See **COLBROOK MOTEL** on page 14



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COLBROOK MOTEL from page 1



COURTESY OF EARL BROOKS

An old postcard, left, featuring the Colbrook Motel, which served Black motorists from 1946 through desegregation. A photo taken in the 1960s, above, of William Brooks Sr. and his wife, Audrey, near the Colbrook Motel off Jefferson Davis Highway.

were governed by deeply discriminatory laws, cars gave African Americans more mobility than ever before, especially after the 1920s, when America's Black middle class began to grow through employment in northern industrial centers.

Still, these travelers needed to find a place to stay, eat and fill up on gas while venturing into unfamiliar areas. Though it wasn't the first, the Green Book became the most well-known travel guide for Black Americans during this time, publishing annually nearly every year from 1936 to 1966.

"The Green Book is very much about Black empowerment," says Catherine Zipf, a Rhode Island-based architectural historian who's researched and written about the subject. "These are places where you're not going to get the humiliation of

being turned away for being Black."

For travelers, the Colbrook was a safe place to rest after a long day of travel. For the local African American community, it was an established meeting place with good food that was run by proprietors with a sterling reputation.

And now history has caught up with the Colbrook, as the not-for-profit Better Housing Coalition, the county and a crew of volunteers are working to commemorate its past. A historical marker is in the works, and other efforts are underway to honor Chesterfield's Black community during the Jim Crow era. The motel's long-derelict buildings have been demolished, and the plan is to turn the site into an affordable housing development.

Once again, it looks like a complex bearing the name Colbrook will provide

shelter and community to people in need.

As a 44-year-old mail carrier in New York City, Victor Green was well versed in knowing where Black people could and could not go. Drawing from his own experiences and those of other mail carriers, he began compiling information on gas stations and hotels in and around the city that welcomed Black people, and in 1936, published this first volume as a guidebook for Black travelers in New York.

By 1938 he'd expanded the book to include localities in 21 states and Washington, D.C.; by the end of the Green Book's three-decade run, it would cover businesses in all 50 states, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Australia and the Caribbean.

With a maximum circulation of 20,000, the Green Book got a massive boost when

Esso (the trading name for ExxonMobil and related companies) gas stations began selling the books, as they were one of the few national chains to serve African Americans at the time. Especially following the 20th century's Great Migration – a term for the movement of millions of African Americans from the rural South to the Northeast, Midwest and West in search of economic opportunity and less pervasive discrimination – Black travelers were on the move more than ever.

Even before the release of the 2018 Mahershala Ali and Viggo Mortensen film that bears its name, the Green Book experienced a flurry of interest from researchers five years ago after the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture digitized the entire 30-year run of the Green Book and posted it online.

Among those researchers is Susan Hellman, who has created a website chronicling Virginia's Green Book businesses. On her site, Hellman has mapped each of Virginia's roughly 300 locations included in the guide and documented what state the structures are currently in. Presently, roughly 30 scholars in 20 states are working with the University of Virginia to build an online database documenting these sites and their historical importance.



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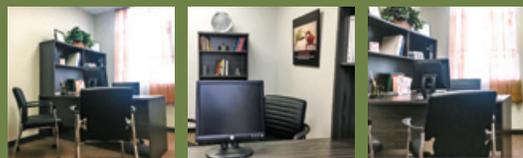
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“People are starting to realize that this is such an interesting part of our history that has been neglected,” Hellman says.

Located about a mile south of the U.S. Route 1/Virginia Route 10 intersection, the Colbrook Motel got its start when Black entrepreneurs William E. Brooks and Courtland Colson decided to purchase an existing log cabin-style motel and gas station in 1946. They named it by combining their surnames.

“The two of them put their heads together and figured out this would be a good place for a business and a good time for a business, specifically a motel, upscale, right there on Route 1,” says William “Earl” Brooks Jr., Brooks’ son, who lives in Reston.

Born in West Virginia, William Brooks Sr. grew up in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania, where he met Audrey Woods. After they married, William served with the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II and Audrey received her master’s in education. The couple then moved to the Petersburg area for teaching opportunities. It was through her connections at Virginia State College – now Virginia State University – that William met Colson and went into business with him on the motel. The Brookses eventually bought Colson out, erected additional buildings on the property and refurbished an adjoining tea room into a full-service restaurant, serving standard American fare like fried chicken, burgers, steaks and fried fish; deviled crabs were their most popular item.

“A lot of local people knew it was a nice place to stop, visit my dad, watch TV, listen to music on the old jukebox,” says Earl, 72. “There were several [Virginia State College] campus people that would come out every so often.”

Earl doesn’t remember the Green Book, but says his father actively pursued being featured in the more upscale “Go Guide to Pleasant Motoring,” which was also a guide for Black travelers in the United States. Though it was an independent publication, the Nationwide Hotel Association used it as its official directory; William Brooks was treasurer for the association.

Earnestine Wilson, 74, who is Black, frequented the Colbrook Motel as a teenager with her boyfriend at the time. Because of the Brookses’ reputation, Wilson says her parents always approved of her going there.

“It was a very nice place, the food was good, there was supervision,” says Wilson, a retired Chesterfield County Public Schools teacher and guidance counselor who is involved in the effort to commemorate the Colbrook. “They were

two people who really cared about young people and wanted them to do well in life.”

Over the years, Audrey Brooks would teach at VSC and serve as the principal of the Blacks-only D. Webster Davis High School on the university’s campus, and as guidance counselor and assistant principal of its successor, George Washington Carver High School, which is now Chesterfield’s Carver College and Career Academy.

The Brookses often helped teenagers who were down on their luck by employing them at the motel. At Carver, Audrey supervised the Delta Teen Club, providing cultural and social opportunities for teenage girls that culminated in a 1963 debutante ball at the Mosque Ballroom, now part of the Altria Theater in Richmond. Audrey was also known for lending a sympathetic ear to young LGBTQ+ students who were struggling with their sexuality.

Earl Brooks, who attended Carver High before transferring to Thomas Dale High School for his senior year when desegregation allowed it, enjoyed growing up at the motel.

“I had a great time. My dad made sure I knew how to work. I made beds, I washed floors, I had my own Pepsi [vending] machine that I was responsible for,” he says.

While attending VSC, Earl fell in love with geology and decided to pursue it as a career. After obtaining a doctorate from the University of Washington, he traveled the globe mapping volcanic rocks, exploring for uranium, and undertaking other geology-related pursuits. Though retired, he’s still pursuing geoarchaeology projects in Peru and Columbia that investigate ancient gold mining.

As for his parents, they decided to sell the motel in the early 1980s and enjoyed a

happy retirement before they both passed in the early 2000s. Though Earl doesn’t remember witnessing any racial discord at the motel growing up, he says his parents probably tried to shield him from it, and that their ability to succeed in business during such a trying time is a testament to their spirit.

“It shows the hard steel of my dad from West Virginia, my mom from Pennsylvania, to put up with the crap of the times and come out [near] millionaires,” he says, noting that his parents’ combined income, investments and motel contributed to their financial success.

These days the Colbrook Motel sign sits tucked away in storage, awaiting refurbishment.

The restored sign will be front and center of a development in the works from the Better Housing Coalition. If all goes according to plan, the not-for-profit will develop the property into about 166 energy-efficient apartments for lower-income households making between 40% and 60% of the area’s median income. With a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units, the Colbrook development will serve individuals and families making between \$30,000 and \$55,000 a year, depending on household size. A prospective timeline would have the project finalized and begin to lease in mid-2023.

Greta Harris, president and chief executive of the BHC, says that with the local housing market continuing to boom, “folks of more modest means struggle to find quality communities at an affordable price.” As such, she says the Colbrook development is an ideal way to fulfill BHC’s mission of developing, owning and managing quality affordable housing in the region.

“It’s in our sweet spot, in that we try to create healthy, safe, affordable places for people to call home,” she says.

Early plans from architecture firm Baskervill feature a playground, a garden, a fitness center, community space and a walking trail that will commemorate the history of the site. Burt Pinnock, principal and chairman of the board at Baskervill, says that just as the Colbrook Motel gave Black motorists a safer way to travel, the development is a continuation of the objective of giving those who need it a safe place to rest their head.

“We’re trying to pay tribute to the history of this site,” Pinnock says. “Safe harbors are cool when you can find them.”

As for Earl Brooks, he’s pleased that the efforts of his parents to help others during segregation are being commemorated by the community.

“It was a tough time, and some of this stuff still hangs on,” he says. “It’s nice that people see it for what it was, and what it did for people back in the ‘50s.” ■

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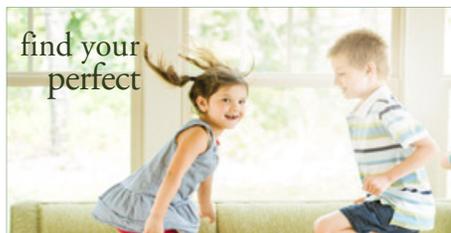
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VOLUME 25, NUMBER 5 | YOUR COUNTY NEWSPAPER SINCE 1995 | CHESTERFIELD.OBSERVER.COM | JANUARY 29, 2020



JAMES HASKINS

POINT OF NO RETURNS

Before Walmart and Amazon, Sears pioneered the American retail experience. Now, the company is leaving Chesterfield – for good

BY RICH GRISET STAFF WRITER

Surrounded by empty shelves and bare showroom floor, the mannequins congregate eerily in one corner: headless, armless and naked.

Electric blue and fuchsia signs advertise slashed prices of 40% to 70% off as bargain hunters scavenge the increasingly empty clothing racks for deals. Apart from any curated display, a row of luggage stands near the escalators, stranded as refugees of one last sale.

“All Sales Final,” proclaims a sign. “No Returns.”

At Chesterfield Towne Center, it's end times for Sears, the last of its breed in the Richmond metro area. Once this two-story, 147,000-square-foot department store was the height of consumerism, selling a wide range of quality, affordable products to a mass audience. Now, like the luggage, this place faces an uncertain future.

The Richmond region's last remaining Sears, at Chesterfield Towne Center, is slated to close for good next month. What the future holds for the fading national retailer, and the mall, remains to be seen.

Last November, Sears owner Transformco announced that this location would be one of 51 Sears and Kmart stores to close in early 2020, leaving the company with 182 Sears and Kmart stores remaining in the United States. Just 10 years ago, Sears operated 3,500 stores.

It's another nail in the coffin for a company that was once the largest retailer in the U.S. Founded in 1892, Sears, Roebuck & Co. was the Amazon of its day, pioneering the idea of selling everything – appliances, clothing, tools and even homes – to everyone, first through mail-order catalogs, then through sprawling stores. Today, there's no other brick-and-mortar retailer quite like it, where customers can purchase seemingly anything under one roof.

“It was the largest retailer on the block for much of the century,” says Vicki Howard, an England-based

See **SEARS** on page 4

Daugherty seeks \$100M in new funds for schools

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

The ink has barely dried on Superintendent Merv Daugherty's proposed operating plan, but school and county officials already are jostling to establish a narrative that will define Chesterfield County's fiscal year 2021 budget negotiations.

The superintendent and School Board members contend they need every penny of the \$777.3 million Daugherty

See **SCHOOL BUDGET** on page 4



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SCHOOL BUDGET from page 1



Merv Daugherty

JENNY MCQUEEN

requested last week from the county and state to meet the demands of a diverse, growing school system they say has been funded inadequately for more than a decade.

It represents an increase of nearly 15% over the school system's current budget, and includes about \$35 million to give Chesterfield teachers their largest pay increase in nearly a decade.

County officials appeared to dismiss the bid for \$100 million in new school spending, however, characterizing the superintendent's budget proposal as excessive and suggesting its most costly initiatives should be funded over time as part of the joint county/schools five-year spending plan.

Their respective opening salvos set the stage for debate on two fundamental questions that have been percolating in Chesterfield for some time: How much of the county's general fund should be allocated to the school system, and does the historically conservative local government have enough money to serve a population that's asking more of it than ever before?

According to County Administrator Joe Casey, the answer to the second question is clearly "yes." Casey noted last week that his proposed fiscal year 2021 budget (which will be introduced in March) will not require an increase to Chesterfield's current real estate tax rate of 95 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

Countywide property assessments are projected to rise by 3.8% this year, providing the county with about \$28 million in new local revenue.

"We are already burdening [taxpayers] with an increase in the average tax bill even if we maintain the existing rates," Casey said during the Board of Supervisors' afternoon work session last Wednesday.

"We have to be mindful of everybody in Chesterfield County," he added. "The average tax bill is going up faster than the inflation rate. We have many people on fixed incomes. We're approaching 70% of our households that don't have school-age children. We have to do our best in presenting a combined school and county objective on a quality of life so 100% of the people understand what we're doing with their precious tax dollar."

Striking that balance isn't easy in a county that is growing rapidly at both ends of the demographic spectrum.

Census data indicates Chesterfield's

senior population has increased by 49% since 2010 – easily the most of any of the Richmond region's four largest localities.

Because of the rising cost of housing, the number of mortgage- and rent-burdened seniors living in the county has nearly doubled over the past 20 years. Affordable housing advocates say a family is cost-burdened when it spends more than 30% of its monthly income on housing.

County leaders have been reluctant to increase the property tax rate because it would have a disproportionately adverse impact on seniors living on fixed incomes and potentially price them out of living in Chesterfield.

At the same time, the county's K-12 student population is growing by about 1,000 annually, as families with school-age children continue to be attracted to a school system that's considered one of the best in Virginia. And many young parents today seem less reflexively opposed to the notion of raising taxes than those in prior generations.

"Taxes aren't always a bad thing, particularly when the money can help us get out of some of the issues we're facing with our school system," such as overcrowded classrooms, a teacher shortage, chronically late buses and deferred facility maintenance, said Joe Elias, the father of two Wintercock Elementary School students and president of the school's Parent Teacher Association.

"We spend less per-pupil in Chesterfield than any of our peer localities in Virginia. That's not something to be proud of," he added.

Elias and about 50 other representatives from Chesterfield PTAs were scheduled to meet with state lawmakers and discuss education funding Monday morning as part of the annual PTA Day at the General Assembly.

They also are rallying parents, teachers and support staff to advocate with members of the Board of Supervisors in support of the superintendent's budget proposal, which currently exceeds projected revenues by about \$54 million. That's roughly equivalent to 14 cents on the county's property tax rate.

School Board members will present the superintendent's spending plan to citizens in their respective magisterial districts at a series of community meetings between Jan. 29 and Feb. 10.

The Board of Supervisors is expected to vote Feb. 19 to advertise Chesterfield's maximum property tax rate for this year.

"This isn't a wish list – this is keeping us above water to help us meet the needs. I think everybody realizes [the school system's] needs are greater than they were 10 years ago, and the responsibilities are greater," Daugherty said during a media briefing last Tuesday.

School officials maintain they need more money to address challenges associated with concentrated poverty, particularly in the eastern half of the county. More than 24,000 Chesterfield students, or about 38% of the total student population, are now eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Since the end of the recession, the number of Chesterfield schools that qualify for Title I funding – based on the percentage of students from low-income families – has grown at a far greater rate than the school system's allocation from the federal government.

The school system also is facing increased demand for services from non-English-speakers. Minority students now represent a majority of its total enrollment for the first time, and Hispanic students are its fastest-growing demographic group.

Because of revisions to the Virginia Department of Education's funding formula, the county government is being asked to provide a larger-than-expected share of the school system's budget this year.

While state funding for Chesterfield schools is expected to increase by \$31.5 million under Gov. Ralph Northam's budget, that's about \$4 million less than school officials planned to receive from the state in fiscal year 2021, which begins July 1.

Noting that all five members of the Board of Supervisors said they support public education when they were running for election last year, Chesterfield County Council PTA President Ben Pearson-Nelson called on them to back up their talk with action.

"If they don't believe in funding education, they should just come out and admit it," he said in an interview last week. "This is my seventh year as a PTA officer and I've seen things get progressively worse in our schools. We're riding on our reputation and things are starting to come apart."

During a presentation to the Board of Supervisors last Wednesday, Deputy County Administrator Matt Harris pointed out that Chesterfield's increasingly diverse population is not solely an issue for the school system – and that allocating even half of the new school spending that Daugherty has requested of the county government would leave it with barely enough new money to give its employees a 2% salary increase, let alone pursue other initiatives.

"The same challenges the school system faces, we face in social services, mental health services, the aging population and all of the other needs," said Leslie Haley, chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors.

Clover Hill Supervisor Chris Winslow acknowledged he was "a little bit shocked" by the size of the superintendent's funding request.

Reached by phone on Monday, School Board Chairwoman Debbie Bailey called Daugherty's plan a "needs-based budget" to ensure that the school system is "fully funded," but said she is willing to work collaboratively with the county on a budget that is "fiscally responsible, [while] at the same time trying to address the needs of our school system."

"I am not going to back away from that request," Bailey said, referring to the proposed budget. "We can fund these needs, maybe, over a course of time."

Pearson-Nelson claimed county officials present a false narrative to citizens by "driving wedges" between the school system and other county departments and pitting them against each other in a competition for local dollars.

"If we want to have a thriving community, we need to have good firefighters, police, schools and roads," he said. "We shouldn't have to choose." ■

SEARS from page 1

business historian who focuses on consumer society and retailing. "It was ubiquitous across the consumer landscape. Every small town main street would have a store, and then, after World War II, every shopping mall would have a Sears or J.C. Penney."

For generations, Sears helped establish consumer trends; to hear Howard tell it, it was Sears that taught Americans how to shop in the modern era. A Sears coming to your town meant the sudden availability of dependable goods, well-paying retail jobs and a place that the whole family could shop together. It built the world's tallest building, founded schools for African American children in the South before desegregation, and helped drive the creation of the postwar shopping mall. Now, as e-commerce and shifting consumer tastes continue to ravage the traditional brick-and-mortar retail model, Sears is facing extinction.

The story of Sears begins with a savvy bit of salesmanship.

While working as a railway station manager in 1886, Minnesotan Richard Warren Sears began selling gold watches to fellow station managers; with the recent implementation of time zones in America, railroad workers used the personal clocks to stay on schedule.

Sears would then start a mail-order business selling the watches with watch repairman Alvah C. Roebuck. The two men's business pursuits were in flux early on, but in 1893 they established Sears, Roebuck & Co., selling a wide range of products by catalog.

At the turn of the 20th century, most Americans lived in rural areas, and the Sears catalog offered farmers living near small towns a way to access goods outside of their local general store. Instead of having to contend with negotiable prices and sales that relied on a storekeeper's estimation of a person's credit, Sears catalogs offered a wide range of goods with clearly stated prices and made a point of soliciting customer feedback.

The Sears catalog of 1894 was 322 pages and featured everything from agricultural equipment and clothing to sporting goods, bicycles and automobiles – all of which could be shipped to rural areas by train. The catalog was more than just a list of goods and prices; it educated consumers through its spreads. Catalog copy advertising tableware might explain the placement and usage of rarer utensils like an asparagus fork, for example.

"They produced a very detailed and massive catalog that would outline all kinds of goods, things that most people would not even buy, as well as all kinds of agricultural implements . . . low-priced fashions, jewelry, all kinds of wares," says Howard, a history professor at the University of Essex in England and author of "From Main Street to Mall: The Rise and Fall of the American Department Store." "People might not have been able to afford much, but at least they could look through the catalog and see what was available."

Through its catalogs, Howard says Sears helped develop a consumer mentality



On the web

For details on school system's proposed budget, visit chesterfieldobserver.com.



COURTESY OF THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF HISTORY & CULTURE

The Sears department store on West Broad Street in Richmond, above, in the 1960s. A two-page spread on denim jeans in the Sears Christmas catalog from 1962, right. Sears, Roebuck & Co. began selling merchandise via catalog in the 1890s.



TODD LAPIN

in Americans. Instead of making items yourself or purchasing them second-hand, it was now a point of status to own something new and modern.

In 1895, Chicago clothing merchant Julius Rosenwald – who helped direct the company’s accelerating growth and diversifying product line – became a partner. Rosenwald would later establish the Rosenwald Fund, which built nearly 5,000 schools primarily for African American children in the South in the early part of the 20th century.

In 1906, the company opened a massive 3 million-square-foot distribution center in Chicago; as the nation urbanized and became less dependent on mail-order services, the distribution center became the site of Sears’ first department store in 1925. The company rapidly expanded, operating more than 300 department stores on the eve of the Great Depression.

By modeling itself as a paragon of thrift, Sears continued to grow through the Depression, becoming known for staple items like socks and sheets instead of more fashionable items that were sold at other stores.

As suburban and automobile culture rose following the post-World War II boom, new, inward-facing shopping malls began siphoning retailers away from main streets and downtowns.

Sears followed suit, becoming synonymous with the suburban shopping experience that embraced car culture. Unlike the downtown department stores, these mall-based Sears locations offered ample free parking, sold auto parts and often had auto service centers on its premises. Amid the rise of fashion-centric department stores, such as Thalhimers and Macy’s, Sears carved out a blue-collar niche, becoming known for its low prices, apparel that was practical and durable household goods such as appliances and tools.

By 1973, Sears, J.C. Penney and Montgomery Ward made up 43% of all department store sales in the United States. It was around this time that Chesterfield would receive a Sears of its own.

On Aug. 16, 1972, the first phase of Cloverleaf Mall opened on Midlothian Turnpike. Named for the yet-to-be constructed Chippenham Parkway cloverleaf interchange, the mall would include 42 stores, and feature a 173,000-square-foot Sears as one of its three anchors.

Developed by retail pioneer Leonard L. Farber of Pompano Beach, Florida, Cloverleaf was a social destination, drawing hundreds of thousands of shoppers from across the metro area; it was such a success that Farber would go on to build the grander, two-story Regency Square in Henrico County in 1975, which also included a Sears.

As a native of Virginia Beach, Garland Pollard warmly recalls visiting the Sears at Pembroke Mall with his family.

“It was rather like going to an Amazon store, [considering] the variety of merchandise,” says Pollard, a former Richmonder who now resides in Sarasota, Florida, and publishes a branding website called Brandland USA. “The genius of the actual Sears stores was that there were so many different departments and so many different products that there was always something interesting for the whole family.”

For devotees, Sears’ appeal was that of durable, no-frills products and honest sales practices and warranties. These qualities also applied to the company’s private label brands. To people of a certain age, there’s no appliance more reliable than a Kenmore; no better tool than a Craftsman. Sears offered unlimited lifetime warranties for most of its hand tools. And, should a Kenmore machine break, Sears’ appliance repair experts were available throughout the country.

“You had a dependable person to come and fix it, and would do it at a consistent price that was fair,” Pollard says. “People respond to wholesome, apolitical companies that serve their customers, and it worked as long as they served their customers and supplied interesting things to them.”

According to Howard, Sears was unique among retailers for its extensive tool, gardening and car care areas, which meant that each family member had a part of the store that spoke to them.

“In a world where the shopping mall and the department store were feminized spaces ... it’s my opinion that Sears held a special place among male consumers,” Howard says.

Brian Glass, senior vice president of retail brokerage for Glen Allen-based Taylor Long Properties, says Sears’ appliances were one of their many strengths.

“They were the market leader in white goods: refrigerators, stoves, washing machines,” he says. “They also had

phenomenal strength with their tools. ... The Sears brand was very strong.”

In the 1970s, inflation began to lure customers away from Sears to lower-price retailers like Walmart, Target and Kmart. Sears took it on the chin from both ends of the market, with upper-middle class consumers opting for the more stylish offerings of higher-end stores, and bargain hunters heading elsewhere. Still, Sears was the largest retailer in the world, and in 1973 moved its headquarters to the newly constructed Sears Tower in Chicago, which would stand as the world’s tallest building for nearly 25 years.

In the 1980s, Sears began pursuing what it called a “socks and stocks” business strategy, attempting to incorporate financial services into its retail model. Sears purchased stockbroker Dean Witter Reynolds and real estate broker Coldwell, Banker & Company. It also launched the popular Discover credit card in 1985.

Things began to change in the 1990s, when discount shopping retailers Walmart and Kmart further capitalized on the lower end of the market and big-box stores like The Home Depot gained ground, specializing in the types of goods Sears had been known for. Walmart overtook Sears as the nation’s largest retailer in the early ’90s; by 2001, Walmart’s revenues were five times those of Sears.

Sears attempted to recover its standing in various ways, such as spinning off its non-retail entities and discontinuing its catalog after sales and profits declined, but nothing quite worked. Additionally, the brand’s image took a hit after a series of pricing scandals were revealed, with the California Department of Consumer Affairs successfully suing the company for engaging in systematic fraud for suggesting unnecessary repairs at its auto care centers.

In 2005, Kmart Holding Corp. purchased Sears for \$11 billion, becoming Sears Holdings. Under the watch of hedge fund manager and new CEO Edward Lampert, Sears sold off many of its most popular brands and divested some of its best real estate locations to cut costs and pare down debt. It reinvested little back into its retail stores, failing to rekindle its connection with

consumers in the age of e-commerce. Sears declared bankruptcy in 2018 but remained open after Lampert won a bankruptcy auction last year. In the wake of the auction, Lampert formed the privately held company Transformco to purchase the surviving assets of Sears Holdings.

Glass says he’s surprised that Sears’ demise has taken so long, given that there hasn’t been any major reinvestment in the company since the 2005 takeover.

“They really didn’t put the money back into getting the brand back into shape, remodeling stores, doing what you need to do to freshen your image,” Glass says.

Though some have stated that better management may have changed things for Sears, Howard is skeptical.

“Sears just represents an older form of retailing that’s under siege from a variety of outside factors,” she says. “[Sears] survived 100 years, but I’m not sure going forward what its place will be in American society. These firms that people get attached to and occupy a sort of space in their childhood and in their daily lives are not permanent.”

Locally, the closing of the Cloverleaf Sears in 2003 contributed to the demise of that mall five years later, as Sears was its last anchor tenant. Last November, Transformco announced that it was shuttering the Chesterfield Towne Center Sears that opened in 1996. What will happen to the property is anyone’s guess.

Reached for comment, Paige Hidlay, Transformco spokeswoman, says that a liquidation sale is in process, and that they plan to close the store in mid-February. She declined to discuss future plans for the property.

“The real estate at Chesterfield Towne Center is a good piece of real estate,” says Glass. “Somebody will do something with that. I’m sure it’s not going to go unnoticed.”

Robert Gibbs, an urban planner, managing principal of the Gibbs Planning Group, and longtime retailing consultant, says it’s depressing to see a “superstar” of retail with such brand recognition and customer loyalty go under.

“People trusted Sears,” Gibbs says. “It’s sad to see them go.” ■



ASH DANIEL

Empty plates

As restaurants struggle to survive, county is forced to rethink plans to float a 4% meals tax

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

On a typical sun-splashed spring evening at The Boathouse's Brandermill location, the outdoor dining area is prime real estate: customers enjoying entrees, cocktails and each other's company, music playing in the background, as they drink in a scenic view of the Swift Creek Reservoir.

It's strangely quiet and empty these days. The restaurant reopened for takeout and delivery orders April 10, three weeks after owner Kevin Healy suspended operations following Gov. Ralph Northam's pandemic-induced ban on nonessential gatherings of more than 10 people, but its dining room and waterfront deck remain closed to the public.

Healy, who owns eight Richmond-area restaurants, including Island Shrimp Co. and Casa del Barco at Chesterfield Towne Center, admits the new takeout and delivery service is "no

replacement" for The Boathouse's regular dine-in business.

"We're doing 5% to 8% of what a normal day [of sales] would be," he said in a telephone interview last Thursday. "But we don't see it as wasted effort. We're staying relevant until things come back ... and it's 8% more than the nothing we were doing when we were shut down."

COVID-19 has had the same devastating effect on restaurants across Chesterfield. While some have closed outright, many others have overhauled their operations and retooled their menus in an effort to survive on takeout and delivery orders until the pandemic ends and "social distancing" is a thing of the past.

Nationwide, the restaurant industry lost an estimated \$25 billion in sales and three million

See **MEALS TAX** on page 3

Larger than the 'virus'

Remembering Bishop Glenn: A complex, commanding presence

BY RICH GRISET STAFF WRITER

Some men meet a woman they like and take her out to dinner and a movie. For Bishop Gerald O. Glenn, a man who found his calling behind the pulpit, the church was a fitting first-date spot.

The year was 1979, and Glenn was employed as a police officer in Portsmouth when he met a woman named Marcietia Simmons while responding to a domestic violence call in her neighborhood; they'd be married two years later. Their first date? Church on Easter Sunday.

"That was it," says Marcietia Glenn, reached by phone last week. "It was love at first sight."

But it was this past Easter Sunday that Glenn's congregation at New Deliverance Evangelistic Church in Chesterfield would learn of his death from an illness related to COVID-19. He was 66.

Glenn, who had presided over New Deliverance since he founded it in 1995, made national news recently for holding church services in conflict with the public health orders of Gov. Ralph Northam and later dying from the novel coronavirus.

See **BISHOP GLENN** on page 11



JENNY McQUEEN

PANTRY EATS

A FRESH TAKE ON STOCKPILED BEANS

Page 7

 **GLEN ROYAL**
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BISHOP GLENN from page 1

Though the incident made headlines, to remember Glenn solely for this last public act is to diminish the legacy of a complex local leader who rallied congregants and had the ear of politicians on both sides of the aisle. In light of his death, both Democratic Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine issued public statements of condolence.

Originally from Kingsville, Texas, Glenn moved to Virginia after his mother married and moved to Petersburg. After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps and the Army, Glenn became a police officer and minister in Portsmouth. He married Marcietia in January 1981, and the couple moved to Texas the following year to live near Glenn's ailing grandmother.

In 1985, after Glenn's grandmother passed, the family moved to Chesterfield to be closer to their parents and Glenn took a job with the Virginia Department of Health Professionals. In 1989, he began pastoring at First Union Baptist Church on Midlothian Turnpike, where he would pastor for seven years. Under Glenn's leadership, the church grew and moved to its current location on Derwent Road in South Richmond. He would also serve as the Chesterfield Police Department's first black chaplain.

In 1995, Glenn started New Deliverance, holding service at George Wythe High School in South Richmond. Soon, he was packing its 1,000-seat auditorium. Two years later, he moved his church to its current location at 1701 Turner Road, eventually growing his flock to more than 2,000, becoming one of the largest black congregations in metro Richmond.

Glenn also served on various commissions and boards. Starting in 1997, he served for nearly two years as the director of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice under Republican Gov. Jim Gilmore. In the early 2000s, he was tapped by then-Gov. Mark Warner to serve on a commission to reduce crime in African American communities.

"He was very intelligent, very fair, hard-working, and he was sought out in a lot of arenas," Marcietia says of her husband. "Very cordial, very charismatic. He would talk to a rock in the street. He just had that personality that was exuberant."

In 2006, he was a supporter of then U.S. Sen. George Allen after Allen came under fire for wearing a rebel flag lapel pin in his youth and for allegedly calling his black teammates the n-word as a quarterback at the University of Virginia. Even after the "macaca" incident – in which Allen called a dark-complexioned person from a rival campaign "macaca," an obscure racial slur meaning monkey – that ultimately sank Allen's reelection bid, Glenn still advocated and voted for him, notably agreeing with Allen's opposition to gay marriage. (Allen later apologized, saying he'd made up the word and wasn't aware of its meaning.)

But Glenn was also one to challenge Chesterfield's Republican power structure, reflecting his youth as a self-professed former "card-carrying-Huey-Newton-Black-Panther-loving-militant." In 2000, he led a boycott of county malls after the Board of Supervisors declared that April was Confederate History and Heritage



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCIETIA GLENN

Month. The boycott appeared to deter some shoppers, and the incident led to David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, coming to Chesterfield Towne Center to promote shopping. Glenn eventually played a role in brokering a deal that resulted in the county amending the resolution as a result of his protest.

Later, when a white supremacy group came to speak at a Chesterfield library in 2002, Glenn again led protests.

"My husband said, 'We're not going to have a white supremacy group here in Chesterfield. That's just not going to happen,'" says Marcietia, who congregants refer to as Mother Glenn. "We gathered together our members, and we went, and it was more of us than there was them."

When then-Superintendent Billy Cannaday decided to open school on Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 2003 to help make up for school days lost to snow and the D.C. sniper shootings, Glenn was his main antagonist, stating that treating the day as an "expendable holiday" was disrespectful.

Former Chesterfield Police Chief Thierry Dupuis recalls calling on Glenn in the wake of the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, over a 2014 incident in which a white police officer shot and killed a black teenager. Dupuis asked Glenn for feedback about his department's outreach efforts into minority communities.

"What he did during that conversation made me feel a lot more at ease, knowing that we had been doing the things correctly, particularly in his eyes," Dupuis says. "As a result of that, he opened up his church for us so we could have some [community outreach] meetings."

Dupuis said Glenn was also instrumental in helping start the police department's Community Partners Breakfasts, quarterly events where members of various communities meet with police to open lines of communication. Again, Glenn opened up his church for public use.

"He wasn't the kind of guy who sat on the sidelines," Dupuis said. "He wanted to talk it out. He wanted to ensure that the community was protected, his church was protected. He was an awesome figure to have around, because he was so strong and he commanded so much respect."

Richmond General District Judge David Hicks, who served on the Warner task force with Glenn, says Glenn could balance both the gentility and the "rough and tumble" nature required by local politics of the 1990s and early 2000s.

"Definitely someone who had an incredible heart for the community. He

recognized the political realities of the world. He did that, and he did it with an ability to be recognized by governors from both parties," says Hicks. "It's not a whole bunch of individuals who have that much stature across both Democratic and Republican lines."

On March 22, Glenn held his last in-person service at New Deliverance, telling the more than 180 churchgoers who showed up that as a pastor, he was "essential." The service was held five days after Gov. Northam had told Virginians to avoid nonessential gatherings of more than 10 people; on March 23, the governor formally declared a ban on any private or public gatherings of 10 or more, going into effect just before midnight the following day.

"I firmly believe that God is larger than this dreaded virus. You can quote me on that," Glenn told his congregation, adding that he would keep preaching "unless I'm in jail or the hospital."

At the time, information surrounding the coronavirus seemed to change daily, Marcietia says, adding that congregants were instructed to socially distance and sanitize their hands before entering the church. "Every day, you were hearing something different, and his thought process was that he needed to make sure that his members were not afraid and understood that God is bigger than the virus, and he is," says Marcietia, who says she and four of her family members are also currently recovering from the coronavirus. "[His decision to hold service] was not from a heart of being defiant. It was from the heart that he served the people and he needed to stand strong and stand firm in a time of adversity, and he preached to the people that we will get through this."

Last week, Chesterfield Health District Director Dr. Alexander Samuel said an investigation into whether the church was the site of an outbreak was still ongoing. Hicks says Glenn's response to the coronavirus is just one part of the man's life story. "That would be a shame if that was all that was remembered of Bishop Glenn," Hicks says. "He was such a complex person that even that had to be viewed in the lens of that complexity." ■

Deadline extended in GOP's 7th District contest

BY JIM MCCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

A Richmond Circuit Court judge last week extended the 7th District Republican Committee's deadline for choosing a congressional nominee to July 28 – a move that could give the committee time to conduct an in-person convention as originally planned.

Citing the COVID-19 pandemic and Gov. Ralph Northam's executive order barring most gatherings of more than 10 people, Judge Bradley Cavedo granted the committee's request for a temporary injunction that permits it to bypass Virginia's June 9 nominating deadline.

"Absent an injunction, the Committee's nominee for Congress will not appear on the ballot for the general election to be conducted on November 3, 2020," Cavedo wrote in his ruling last Tuesday.

The 7th District GOP was scheduled to hold a convention April 25 at the Arthur Ashe Center in Richmond, during which delegates would choose one of six candidates to run against U.S. Rep. Abigail Spanberger in November.

That plan was scrapped after Northam, aiming to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, issued a statewide stay-at-home order last month that runs through June 10.

Since then, the committee has been evaluating several contingency plans, including a drive-through convention and voting by mail.

"There are pros and cons to each," said the committee's chairman, Ben Slone, in a telephone interview last Friday.

Under Cavedo's ruling, the 7th District GOP has until 7 p.m. on July 28 to nominate a candidate.

Slone noted the committee's preference is to conduct an in-person convention if the health emergency ends in time, but "we're keeping all options on the table for now."

"Our priority is ensuring that our delegates get to select the nominee," he added.

Nearly 5,100 Republicans have filed paperwork to serve as convention delegates in the sprawling 7th District, which includes parts of Chesterfield and Henrico and all of Orange, Culpeper, Goochland, Louisa, Nottoway, Amelia and Powhatan counties.

The six candidates include two Chesterfield residents, Tina Ramirez and Pete Greenwald, two current members of the General Assembly, Delegates Nick Freitas and John McGuire, retired Army Green Beret Andrew Knaggs and Coast Guard veteran Jason Roberge.

They're vying to face Spanberger, whose 2018 victory over two-term incumbent Rep. Dave Brat flipped a seat that had been held by Republicans for decades and helped Democrats secure a majority in the House.

"From the beginning I've said I trust the committee to come up with a process that is transparent and fair to all candidates," Ramirez said in a recent interview. "They're trying their best to make sure all of our delegates get to vote." ■