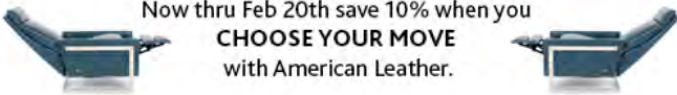




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Richmond restaurant refuses service to Family Foundation

Cites political stances as reason for canceled reservation

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 2, 2022 BY KATE ANDREWS


A German-inspired restaurant in Richmond canceled a reservation for a conservative political organization's private event last week, saying in a statement posted online Thursday night that the decision was made to protect their staff, many of whom are women and/or part of the LGBTQ community. The Family Foundation, the organization that had made the reservation, opposes same-sex marriage and abortion, among other positions.

Metzger Bar and Butchery, in Richmond's Union Hill neighborhood, posted a



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statement Thursday night on [Instagram](#) about the decision to cancel the Family Foundation's reservation Wednesday.

"Metzger Bar and Butchery has always prided itself on being an inclusive environment for people to dine in," the restaurant said in the statement. "In eight years of service, we have very rarely refused service to anyone who wished to dine with us. Recently we refused service to a group that had booked an event with us after the owners of Metzger found out it was a group of donors to a political organization that seeks to deprive women and LGBTQ+ persons of their basic human rights in Virginia."

Family Foundation President Victoria Cobb wrote in a [blog post](#) Thursday that the foundation's vice president of operations got a call from Metzger about an hour and a half before the 7 p.m. Wednesday reservation notifying her of the cancellation.

"One of the restaurant's owners called our team to cancel the event," Cobb wrote in the post, which linked to Metzger's Yelp page. "As our VP of operations explained that guests were arriving at their restaurant shortly, she asked for an explanation. Sure enough, an employee looked up our organization, and their waitstaff refused to serve us."



Victoria Cobb, president of The Family Foundation of Virginia, speaks at a March for Life rally in April 2019. Photo courtesy Family Foundation of Virginia

After Hanko asked the restaurant for the reason of the cancellation, Cobb said that she was told that a member of the waitstaff found out that the reservation was for the Family Foundation "and they had a lot of gay waitstaff," who were presumably opposed to some of the organization's political stances, which have included opposition to same-sex marriage and support for gay conversion therapy.

"We have always refused service to anyone for making our staff uncomfortable or unsafe, and this was the driving force behind our decision," Metzger said in its statement. "Many of our staff

Richmond restaurant Metzger Bar and Butchery canceled a reservation from the Family Foundation on Nov. 30, 2022, citing the conservative advocacy group's opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage. Photo by Matthew R. O. Brown

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In an interview Friday with Virginia Business, Cobb said her colleague, Erica Hanko, had reserved the private room at least a week or two earlier for a dessert event for about 15 to 20 people. On Wednesday at about 5:30 p.m., Cobb said, Hanko was on her way to the restaurant to check the room's seating when she received a call from a Metzger representative who said they had to cancel, without explaining why. "She was honestly thinking, 'Is this a COVID thing?'" because of the abrupt cancellation, Cobb said.

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are women and/or members of the LGBTQ+ community. All of our staff are people with rights who deserve dignity and a safe work environment. We respect our staff's established rights as humans and strive to create a work environment where they can do their jobs with dignity, comfort and safety."

As of Friday, Yelp had disabled the ability for people to post comments on Metzger Bar and Butchery's [page](#) after it received numerous negative reviews related to the incident, quickly followed by several positive reviewers attempting to counteract the one-star reviews.

"This business recently received increased public attention, which often means people come to this page to post their views on the news," Yelp's notice read. "While we don't take a stand one way or the other when it comes to this incident, we've temporarily disabled the posting of content to this page as we work to investigate whether the content you see here reflects actual consumer experiences rather than the recent events."

When asked about the negative Yelp reviews of the business, which included one poster's vow to "never set foot in a restaurant that bows to progressive employees who refuse to serve Christians" and another who wrote, "I have learned that only certain types of people are welcome at Metzger's," Cobb said, "I hope that their tone and approach is honorable. Even food service has now been polarized. It's just disappointing that we can't have a meal together."

Cobb added that a website design company declined to design her foundation's website for political reasons, and the former provider of its customer relationship management software, EveryAction, which became part of new parent company Bonterra in March, canceled the foundation's contract, forcing the foundation to move its databases to a different system. "While many who hold the same beliefs may not experience this directly yet, we recognize we are on the tip of the spear," Cobb wrote in her blog post.

Metzger co-owner and former "Top Chef" competitor Brittanny Anderson did not respond to messages Friday seeking further comment, but the restaurant's Instagram account posted a photo Friday of a drink named "Cracks in the Foundation," along with the announcement that it would donate all proceeds of the cocktail's sales Friday to LGBTQ advocacy group Equality Virginia. "We are so grateful to our many guests and neighbors for their support the past few days!" the post read.

Cobb said Friday that Hanko was able to find another restaurant to seat her guests, all of whom were from the Richmond area. She declined to name that restaurant to shelter it from criticism, but said that it "happily accommodated us. We live in a free market, [so] we took our business elsewhere."

Civil rights pioneer weighs in



In her blog post, Cobb mentioned an earlier instance in which a group was refused service — the 1960 Thalhimers department store lunch counter sit-in by 34 Black Virginia Union University students protesting racial segregation in Jim Crow-era Richmond. Cobb argued in her blog post that “people who likely consider themselves ‘progressives’” — meaning Metzger’s owners — are attempting to “recreate an environment from the 1950s and early ’60s, when people were denied food service due to their race. ... Welcome to the double standard of the left.”

The 1960 Thalhimers lunch counter sit-in protesters, [known as the Richmond 34](#), were arrested for trespassing and were recognized last year by the [Virginia General Assembly](#) for their enduring impact as part of the 20th-century Southern civil rights movement.

Elizabeth Johnson Rice, now an 82-year-old retired teacher living in Chesterfield County, was a member of the Richmond 34. She said the situation surrounding the Family Foundation and Metzger is somewhat different than the sit-in, one of numerous nonviolent protests conducted in the 1950s and ’60s to oppose racial discrimination against Black people. Those protests often led to arrests, violence against protesters and sometimes deaths.

On Feb. 22, 1960, Rice and her fellow protesters were arrested and charged with trespassing, taken to jail and then released on bail. In March 1960, they were all convicted of trespassing and fined \$20 each, but the students all appealed the decision to the Virginia Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the store owners’ right to forgo service. Ultimately, in 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered a repeal of the 34 students’ convictions in a victory for the civil rights movement.

“We were going for equal justice for all,” Rice said Friday. “We were trespassing because we didn’t get service. [As Black people], if we wanted to eat anything [from Thalhimers’ lunch counter], we had to go into the alley and knock on the little door. That was really Jim Crow.”

Rice said that she still believes in equal rights for everyone today, including the right to marry someone of the same sex, but at the same time, she feels the Family Foundation party was “not being treated fairly” by Metzger Bar and Butchery. “Their reservation should be honored in 2022.”

Dining and culture wars

Restaurants have provided an occasional backdrop to the culture wars playing out in recent years, as some Trump-era White House officials were refused service or targeted by protesters while dining out. In the aftermath of such incidents, social media can amplify the political polarization and lead to prolonged problems for business owners and staff members.

In 2018, the owner of The Red Hen restaurant in Lexington [asked then-White House Press Secretary and future Arkansas Gov.-elect Sarah Huckabee Sanders to leave her restaurant](#) after her staff expressed their discomfort about serving Sanders’ party. The group left quietly and was not asked to pay for their drinks and appetizers that they had already been served.

But that incident — which eventually was recounted by President Donald Trump’s Twitter account and numerous national news outlets — led to months of hate mail and doxxing of the Red Hen’s owner, Stephanie Wilkinson. The restaurant’s Yelp reviews reflected the political divide.

In a phone interview Friday, Wilkinson said that although she wasn’t familiar with the particulars of the Metzger situation, “my feeling about the role of privately owned businesses following their moral conscience has not changed,” and she did not regret her decision to refuse service to Sanders, [who was elected Arkansas’ first woman governor](#) in November.

She said that her decision was based not specifically on Sanders’ political views; “it was about actions we found reprehensible.” (At the time, Wilkinson had cited Sanders’ support for Trump positions such as separating migrant children from their parents, as well as opposition to transgender people serving in the military.) Similarly, if Metzger’s owners and staff found the Family Foundation’s actions “morally repugnant,” Wilkinson said, “I think I agree with them” in their refusal to serve the organization at the restaurant.

But Wilkinson also posited a hypothetical scenario: If a different business’s owners objected to a political group or individual’s stance supporting abortion access and refused them service on that basis, she couldn’t object on moral grounds, even though Wilkinson personally supports the right to abortion.

In 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court partially agreed with a bakery owner’s assertion that he could refuse a client service based on his religious convictions.

In 2012, the owner of a Colorado bakery refused to make a cake for the marriage of a gay couple based on his Christian beliefs. The couple filed a complaint to the state’s civil rights commission, which led to a [lawsuit that reached the U.S. Supreme Court](#) in 2019. The high court ruled 7-2 that the commission did not employ religious neutrality, violating baker Jack Phillips’ right to free exercise, although the court did not rule on broader issues like anti-discrimination laws, free exercise of religion and freedom of speech. Phillips is back in court now, [having refused](#) to bake a cake for a transgender woman’s transition celebration.

However, a [case heard Monday](#) by the Supreme Court — in which a Colorado graphic artist objects to designing websites for gay couples’ weddings on religious grounds — could have an impact. Critics say a ruling in the artist’s favor could lead to businesses discriminating against people based on race, religion or other factors.

“The hospitality industry is very tricky,” added Wilkinson, who opened The Red Hen in 2008 and has lived in Lexington for nearly 30 years. For customers, she said, a restaurant “feels like it

ought to be part of a refuge. When these things happen, people have a visceral feeling of rejection. It feels like being booted out of your relative's house." And for employees, "it's not just their job. There's often this sense that [it's] a family."

The Red Hen continues to feel an impact from the Sanders incident, she said, with staff still fielding occasional "nasty messages" and the restaurant requiring a specialized reservation system that helps prevent nuisance reservations meant to keep real diners away. But also, Wilkinson says, "we continue to have people travel insane distances" to dine at the restaurant, and no longer does she "live and die by yesterday's Yelp reviews and Google reviews. I'm liberated from having to look at that."



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Chesapeake Walmart shooting raises workplace violence concerns

Six workers killed by manager in mass shooting, police say

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 23, 2022 BY KATE ANDREWS

UPDATED NOV. 27

Late Tuesday, a Chesapeake Walmart manager shot and killed six people, wounded at least six more and then killed himself, police said. According to police and media reports, all six of those slain were Walmart employees and two were killed in the break room.

On Wednesday, Walmart's corporate office released a [statement](#) confirming that the shooter was Andre Bing, 31, an overnight supervisor who had worked at the store, located at



Law enforcement work the scene of a mass shooting at a Walmart, Wednesday, Nov. 23, 2022, in Chesapeake. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

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1521 Sam's Circle, since 2010. Armed with a 9mm handgun and several magazines he purchased from a local store the same day, Bing was found dead of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound in the Walmart break room, according to Chesapeake Police. One of the victims was a 16-year-old boy. Police responded to the shooting at 10:12 p.m. Tuesday and there were about 50 shoppers in the store at the time of the attack.

"The devastating news of last night's shooting ... at the hands of one of our associates has hit our Walmart family hard," Walmart president and CEO Doug McMillon said in a statement Wednesday. "My heart hurts for our associates and the Chesapeake community who have lost or injured loved ones."

Walmart released a further statement, saying the company was "working swiftly to provide resources to the community and our store associates, and we are continuing our work to create a safe experience for associates and customers in every store."

Workplace shootings make up 31.5% of U.S. mass shootings — typically defined as three or more people shot by another person in a single incident — in a study of shooting events between 1966 and 2022 conducted by [The Violence Project](#), a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that maintains a national database of mass shootings. This year, as of Nov. 23, according to the [Gun Violence Archive](#), there have been 607 mass shootings in the United States, including 36 mass killings.

Speaking Wednesday morning when details about the mass shooting, including the motive, were still unknown, Dr. Rebecca Cowan, a Virginia Beach licensed professional counselor who served on a state commission that investigated the [2019 Virginia Beach municipal office mass killing](#), says that some workplace shooters "may have some sort of grievance, whether that's rooted in reality or perceived. Sometimes people have paranoia and feel like people are talking about them."

Mental health is usually one of multiple factors in such incidents, she added. Relationship troubles, money issues and childhood trauma can also contribute to violent events, Cowan noted.

Chesapeake Police later confirmed that a "[death note](#)," which contained paranoid ramblings and religious references, had been found on Bing's phone. In the letter, he expressed worries that management was plotting to fire him and claimed employees had "harassed" and "mocked" him.

"The associates [orchestrated] it they laughed and made subtle code speeches which I eventually figured out," Bing wrote. "The associates gave me evil twisted grins, mocked me and celebrated my down fall [sic] the last day. That's why they suffer the same fate as me."

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Unlike mass killings of victims unknown to the shooter, workplace shootings are considered “targeted attacks,” Cowan said, and shooters may take their time planning attacks. Sometimes that results in “leakage,” a term relating to a shooter hinting at their plans ahead of time, whether to friends or family, or on social media. Anonymous reporting mechanisms like tip lines, she said, could help workplaces prevent future violence.

Jaclyn Schildkraut, interim executive director of the Regional Gun Violence Research Consortium and an associate professor of criminal justice at the State University of New York Oswego, sees parallels between school shootings and workplace shootings. Both often involve perpetrators with close connections to the locations — either former or current workers or former or current students in many cases, she says.

“They understand the patterns of activity, the security. It’s someplace that’s familiar, so it might kind of break down some of the tension of scouting someplace new,” she said Wednesday.

“We do know that mass shootings have increased over the past several decades,” Schildkraut said. “The challenge of answering the question, ‘Are workplace shootings specifically increasing over the past several years?’ [is that] we had a lot of workplaces closed because of COVID.” However, the Gun Violence Archive, which bases its data on incident reports from 7,500 sources, reports that there were 611 mass shootings in 2020, up from 417 in 2019.

Even without firm stats, many people in the U.S. feel the impact of frequent mass shootings — including in Virginia, where a University of Virginia student shot five fellow undergrads last week, killing three U.Va. football players. Tuesday’s killings also made some Hampton Roads residents recall the 2019 massacre in Virginia Beach, another workplace shooting in which DeWayne Craddock killed 12 people, many of whom were his co-workers, before he was shot and killed by police.

In that case, the FBI was not able to land on Craddock’s motive, acknowledging in a [report](#). “The evidence is clear that the suspect was a very private person who shared little personal information or feelings with co-workers. Despite exhaustive investigative work and in spite of unsubstantiated rumors and accusations, it appears we may never know why he committed this heinous act.”

Schildkraut said there are no national statistics on how common it is for a manager or a supervisor to kill co-workers, as in Chesapeake. Cowan acknowledged the lack of broad data and noted that no matter what position a shooter holds at a business, “It really depends on the grievance and what is happening.”

Aside from COVID temporarily shutting down some businesses and more people working from home, Cowan said that more people have reported experiencing suicidal ideations since the



pandemic. According to The Violence Project, about 31% of mass shooters said they experienced suicidal feelings before an attack, and 59% of mass shooters died at an attack scene.

Chris Stuart, vice president of Norfolk-based security firm Top Guard Security, noted that another common pandemic-era factor at many workplaces — labor shortages — has ramped up stress. “They’re blessed just to have the 66% of staff in that day,” he said of many businesses, and being shorthanded could mean “there’s a higher risk of [violent] situations.”

Many potential corporate clients begin with asking Stuart about hiring armed guards for their businesses, but after conversations about the clients’ goals, most wind up hiring unarmed guards, he said. “If you hop in your car and you’re on the interstate and you see a state trooper, whether you’re speeding or not, you’re going to slow down a little bit. We wear uniforms for the same purpose.” Another common security feature at workplaces is the photo ID, and businesses should be quick to deactivate IDs when a worker quits or is fired, Stuart said, adding that most workplaces have improved on that in the past decade.

There are some places — shipping docks, government buildings and other workplaces with sensitive or valuable items — that require armed protection, but that rarely extends to average commercial offices, campuses or storefronts, Stuart said. “The goal is not to add a deadly weapon.”



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Va. Credit Union loses bid to expand membership

SCC rules VACU can't add 10K Medical Society of Va. members

PUBLISHED AUGUST 3, 2022 BY KATE ANDREWS

The Virginia State Corporation Commission ruled Wednesday that the Chesterfield County-based Virginia Credit Union cannot expand its membership to the Medical Society of Virginia, possibly resolving a three-year battle between the credit union, the Virginia Bankers Association and several community banks in the state.

The credit union issued a brief statement Wednesday: "We are disappointed by the decision. We believe that extending membership eligibility as an option for members of the society was reasonable." Under state law, VACU has the option to appeal the decision to the Virginia Supreme Court, but spokesman Glenn Birch said



Virginia Credit Union's attempt to add the Medical Society of Virginia's 10,000 members was disputed by the Virginia Bankers Association and seven community banks. Photo by Rick DeBerry

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Wednesday that the credit union has not decided whether it plans to appeal.

The dispute [started in August 2019](#), when the VBA and seven small community banks appealed to the SCC in protest after the state Bureau of Financial Institutions in July 2019 approved VACU's request to offer membership to the medical society's 10,000 members. The banks contended that with 10,000 more members, VACU would have too great an advantage over community banks, which operate under different rules than nonprofit credit unions and could potentially lose tax revenue. In March, the banks summed up their case, declaring that "credit unions have a sweet deal," with "no [federal or state] income taxes ... and no obligations to invest in the community." Credit unions are, however, responsible for paying real estate and personal property taxes.

Ultimately those arguments meant less in Wednesday's ruling by SCC Commissioners Jehmal T. Hudson and Judith Williams Jagdmann, who found that VACU did not meet the required burden of proof that the medical society was unlikely to be able to form its own credit union — which is preferable under state law, as opposed to allowing a large organization's members to join an existing credit union. The society has more than \$3.52 million in securities and more than \$1 million in equity in its building that could help fund a new MSV credit union, according to research by economic analyst Christine Chmura on behalf of the banks. Also, the society's CEO, Melina Davis, is a member of the credit union's board and "could provide valuable expertise" to an MSV credit union, according to the ruling, citing Chmura's report.

VBA President and CEO Bruce Whitehurst said Wednesday that his organization is "obviously pleased with the ruling, which is consistent with state law." Steven C. Yeakel, president and CEO of the Virginia Association of Community Banks, echoed Whitehurst's comment, saying, "We are obviously pleased with the ruling."

However, Virginia Credit Union League President and CEO Carrie Hunt said, "It remains disappointing and frustrating that the bankers continue to thwart credit unions from providing provident credit to Virginians. The reality is, credit unions are not in competition with community banks. Large banks are. The Virginia Credit Union League will continue to zealously fight for the interests for all credit unions in Virginia to do what they do best — provide the best in consumer financial services to citizens in the commonwealth."

Virginia Credit Union is the third largest credit union based in Virginia, with about \$5.04 billion in total assets as of March and more than 300,000 members. In 2019, the credit union said that the medical society approached it about joining, and the matter was brought before the Bureau of Financial Institutions, which is required to approve any membership expansion of more than 3,000 under state law. VACU, like many credit unions, has expanded its scope for membership over the years. It started as a service only for state employees, but its charter was changed to

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include city and county employees, students at state universities and people who live in several localities in Virginia, including Fredericksburg, Petersburg and Richmond.

The case took longer than expected, as an original SCC hearing took place in July 2020, with a decision expected later that year. However, Whitehurst noted, the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced most work to take place virtually at first, and the commissioners' decision to hold a second hearing last year, caused the ruling's delay. SCC spokesperson Andy Farmer said Wednesday that "this was a complex case with multiple parties participating and a significant amount of evidence. In their deliberations, the SCC commissioners review the entire case record."



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