

# The Daily Progress

Virginia first baseman added to USA Baseball training camp roster



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Charlottesville mayor makes a cameo in play about local history

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Tuesday, June 27, 2023

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## DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

# ‘Don’t tell me there’s no magic there’

How fundraising numbers moved the needle in the Democratic primary

**JASON ARMESTO**  
The Daily Progress

The dust is beginning to settle after the June 20 Democratic primary, and some numbers can help shed some light on how the races played out.

First things first: money. In every state house race in the

region, the better-funded campaigns came out on top.

Despite getting big checks from Democratic donor Sonjia Smith and two national political action committees, Del. Sally Hudson couldn’t keep up with state Sen. Creigh Deeds’ financial backing. According to the Virginia Pub-

lic Access Project, as of June 8 Hudson’s campaign spent over \$850,000, a daunting figure for a state senate race.

But Deeds spent more. Just over \$1 million, with his biggest donors being state Sens. Scott Sur-ovell and Mamie Locke’s candi-date committees. He also received

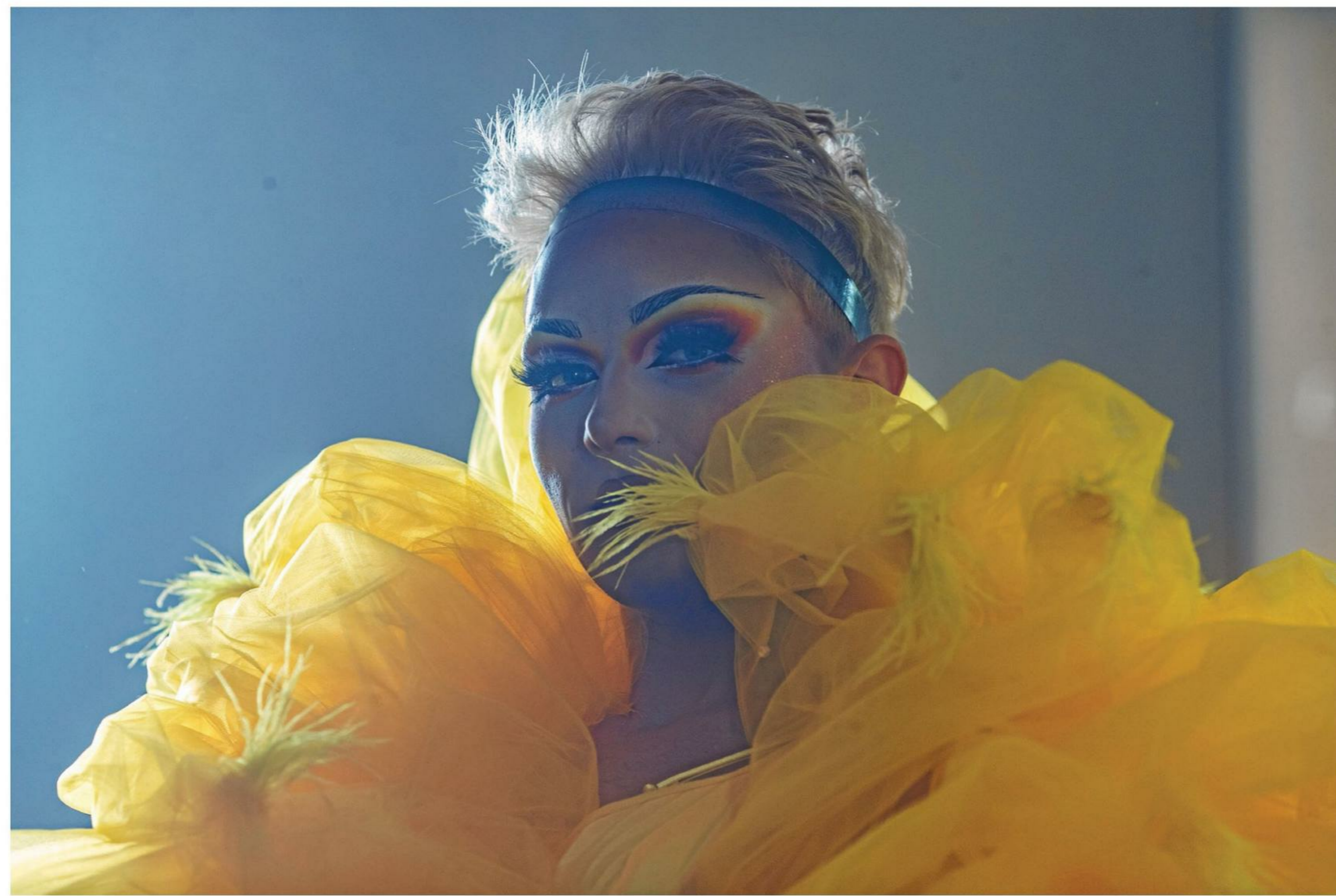
\$36,000 from Virginia Realtors, a political action committee.

In House District 55, Kellen Squire spent nearly \$200,000 of his donations. But he was still outspent by victor Amy Laufer to the tune of \$30,000. Laufer’s big-gest donation came from Emily’s List, a political action committee

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## ENTERTAINMENT

# MEET THE QUEENS RUNNING CHARLOTTESVILLE’S DRAG SCENE



**CAL CARY, THE DAILY PROGRESS**

Drag queen Darling Nikki poses at a drag brunch at the Common House social club in downtown Charlottesville on Saturday, June 25, 2023.

## Duo Bebe Gunn and Cherry Possums are running this town just like a club

**HALEY SANDLOW**  
The Daily Progress

It’s a Friday evening, and Bebe Gunn is choosing a wig. It’s between the short green one, the long, loose blond number and the black and white ponytail. Others lay in a black suitcase, tucked between ripped tights and hip pads.

“I want something I can whip around for ‘Mr. Watson,’” she said, pulling the blond number over her wig cap. She completed the ensemble with a gray, reflective bodysuit, asking her fellow drag queen and performing partner Cherry Possums to zip her up.

That night, the pair performed a drag show with two other queens at Glozet, a monthly pride event hosted at Crozet Pizza at Buddhist Biker Bar. It was the first of three shows they would host in Charlottesville that weekend, with drag brunches Saturday and Sunday, before returning home to Richmond.

Gunn and Possums have been running the Charlottesville drag scene for nearly two years, after the pair revived monthly drag shows at the Southern Cafe and Music Hall. Possums did shows with another queen at the Southern and Rap-ture back in 2017, returning in 2021 with Gunn at her side.

“One of the things that we kept hearing people say is that they’ve been dying to see a drag show here in Charlottesville,” Possums said. “So that’s why we’re bringing it back.”

The Richmond drag scene is already very established, according to the pair, who found it easier to make a name for themselves in Charlottesville. “We’ve really just built this huge following for ourselves here, and it’s incredible,” Gunn said.

The duo organizes, hosts and performs

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## CRIME & COURTS

# Man shot dead on sidewalk

Sunday afternoon shooting leaves 1 dead, city facing another death by gunfire

**DAILY PROGRESS STAFF**

One man is dead after a reported shooting on South Street in downtown Charlottesville Sunday afternoon.

Charlottesville police on the scene told The Daily Progress that the matter was being investigated as a “suspicious death” and that they did not believe there to be “any immediate threat to the community.”

Neither the victim nor any suspect were named.

Police had much of the 200 block of South Street cordoned off Sunday afternoon.

A thunderstorm had moved through the area Sunday afternoon, and a canopy had been erected over the sidewalk where a tarpaulin had been draped over the body of the victim.

It was reported that the deceased had been struck by a bullet in the upper part

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## YOUR DAILY PROGRESS

# Welcome to your enhanced Daily Progress

Today marks the 1st edition of our new print product

**THE DAILY PROGRESS**

Greetings, readers, and welcome to your new Daily Progress.

As your news consumption habits change, we’re always looking for ways to improve our products and provide the most engaging local news report. You’ve told us you value the type of deeply reported local news that you can only find in The Daily Progress, and your continued support allows us to give you the most comprehensive coverage of local news, sports, business and features.

While we’re using your reading habits to inform changes to our products, we’ve also had to pay close attention to

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Summer academy for Black students about more than math skills **PAGE A2**

**Weather**  
Mostly cloudy; t-storms  
**High 83 • Low 64**

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## Queens

From A1

monthly shows at the Southern, Crozet Pizza and the South and Central restaurant at the Dairy Market food hall, and occasionally at other venues downtown such as restaurants Rapture and Umma's and the Common House social club. They are also frequently asked to do private shows or pop-up events, Possums said.

The Southern, which regularly hosts live music events, is their main stage. It's the most "immersive" drag experience of the venues in Charlottesville, Gunn said, where the queens can try out new numbers. Those drag shows are lively but can also get "pretty unhinged," said Lou Wilkin, an employee at the Southern.

"I think allowing the queens a space to perform and having a reliable relationship with them, it's a pretty cool thing to demonstrate that level of involvement in the queer community," Wilkin said.

Once their shows are over for the weekend, they return to Richmond, where Gunn and Possums share an apartment.

At home, without the wigs and the heels and the lashes and the hair, Gunn is Thomas Lee, an AT&T employee, and Possums is Josh Austin, a fraud investigator at Capital One.

But then the weekend rolls around again, and Gunn and Possums are right back at it, lip-syncing, dancing and whipping their hair for Charlottesville crowds showering them with singles.

"This is a job that's fun, it's something that we enjoy doing," Gunn said. "We feel like celebrities because there's just dozens of people cheering for us."

After turning 18, the young Lee became enamored with the queens at a gay bar in Roanoke, where he grew up. He started performing



CAL CARY, THE DAILY PROGRESS

From left to right, Lavender Menace and Bebe Gunn get ready before a drag brunch at the Common House social club in downtown Charlottesville on Saturday, June 25, 2023.

under the name Bebe Gunn not long after, to push himself out of his comfort zone.

"I have aggressive stage fright," Gunn said. "I don't anymore. That literally melted away as soon as I put the wig on. I was like, 'OK honey, I can take over the world. Y'all can't tell me nothing. I'm fierce!'"

At Gunn's very first competition, she met Possums, who went by Cherry Poppins at the time.

"I had known of her, and I was in awe, I was starstruck," Gunn said. "I was like, 'Oh my god, hey girl!' and she was just like, 'Oh my god, I see something in you,' and I was like, 'Paint me girl!' And the rest was history."

"In other words, I had a stalker," Possums joked. "And I thought it'd be easier to just let her in than to get the police involved."

The two learned they had graduated from the same high school in Roanoke four years apart, where both of them had been somewhat involved in theater. The future Bebe Gunn, still struggling with stage fright, painted the stone wall set pieces for "Beauty and the Beast,"

while the future Miss Possums was Reporter No. 2 in "Bye-Bye Birdie." "I'm a really shy and reserved person," Possums said. "It's easier to be wild and crazy if people are saying that's Cherry, that's not Josh. It's completely freeing. And you're also able to support the feminine side of your personality without fear of judgment."

"Shy" and "reserved" would be the last words used to describe Possums as she twirled to Laura Branigan's "Gloria" in a neon dress and green jacket at Common House's drag brunch Saturday, letting the audience stick singles in the cleavage of her breast plate. Gunn performed next, cartwheeling to a Kelly Clarkson song. Three other queens completed the Saturday morning set, Gunn and Possums introducing each one at masters of ceremony, flirting with the audience and encouraging applause and tips.

"We need two things from you guys, OK?" Gunn told the audience at the start of the set. "I need you to cheer for your divas. We're working, we're twerking and you're gonna love it. Also, we're going to need

**"I have never, not once, felt unsafe in Charlottesville. We've never had anyone say anything sideways to us. ... We've never felt like that in Roanoke or Richmond."**

**-Cherry Possums, drag queen**

your money, honey! We are walking it, we are hopping it and we need gas money."

Most of the queens performing in Richmond, where the drag scene is "oversaturated," can be intense and competitive, said Lavender Menace, one of the queens who performed on Saturday. Her rendition of "Copacabana" followed by "Jump In the Line" was punctuated with high kicks, hip swings and plenty of shimmies.

Darling Nikki, who performed "Only Love Can Hurt Like This" with a long yellow boa, was up at 6 a.m. in Roanoke to get ready for Saturday's show in Charlottesville. In Roanoke the drag scene is "undersaturated" and the stage at the city's gay bar creates an unfriendly dynamic between certain queens, Nikki said.

It's been years since Charlottesville had a true gay bar, after Impulse closed in 2020, Escape closed in 2018 and Club 216 was shuttered in 2012. But that just means Charlottesville is a "melting pot" of different kinds of drag performance, with queens coming from Virginia, D.C. and even South Carolina, Nikki said.

"The crowds here are coming for the show," Nikki said. "They give you energy consistently no matter what venue you go to."

And Charlottesville's drag duo makes it worth the performers' time, gas and expensive wigs, paying their queens more than they

would make for a show in Richmond.

Charlottesville is also more accepting than Richmond, Possums said. "I have never, not once, felt unsafe in Charlottesville. We've never had anyone say anything sideways to us. We feel comfortable going into the gas station without taking our makeup off, and we've never felt like that in Roanoke or Richmond."

"There's so much acceptance here," Gunn said. A large part of their crowds consist of University of Virginia students, "baby gays" in their first years being a part of a queer community. "But we get a lot of middle-aged women, a lot of men. A lot of straight people!"

"It's a lot of doctor's wives," Possums added. She remembered receiving a \$40 Venmo tip from an older woman one night, specifically because she had performed a song by Kate Bush.

"With the political climate going on, it's refreshing to have this queer space," Gunn said. "A lot of people are sitting here and talking down on drag and calling it something that it isn't. At the end of the day, it is an art form. It is a form of expression!"

Gunn and Possums are performing in a drag duo competition next month in Richmond called the "Perfect Pairs Pageant." Within another year, they both plan to move to Charlottesville and will continue to run the drag scene side by side.

"She doesn't want to call herself my drag mother, so I just say we're sisters," Gunn said on Friday, brushing a stray bit of makeup off of Possum's nose.

"We've been really good friends since 2016," Possums said.

"Since the dawn of time!" Gunn said, before strutting downstairs to set up before the show.

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## Numbers

From A1

dedicated to getting pro-abortion women elected to office.

While spending in those two races was relatively close, House District 54 saw a very lopsided fundraising matchup. Katrina Callsen spent \$120,000 more than both of her opponents combined. Nearly half of her total donations came from Smith.

One of Callsen's opponents, Belamy Brown, pointed to the huge gap in funding on his Facebook page. With a screenshot of the total spending, he wrote, "Don't tell me there's no magic there!"

Asked to clarify, Brown told The Daily Progress he meant that his campaign "achieved a greater return on investment."

All told, Callsen spent \$27.29 per vote, while Brown spent \$5.49 and

Dave Norris spent \$5.05.

Money matters, but it alone does not decide races. A good ground game can also help a candidate get across the finish line.

Callsen's team knocked on more than 15,000 doors during her campaign, likely outpacing Brown and Norris. Brown estimates that he knocked on upwards of 4,000 doors. Norris was unsure of his total, telling The Daily Progress that his team "definitely focused more on meet and greets as an outreach strategy."

Naturally, a bigger team can cover more ground and knock on more doors. Financing helps with that, and may explain why Callsen's campaign was able to canvass so many homes.

Laufer's campaign did not respond when asked for its door-knocking total, but in an interview with The Daily Progress a week before the election, Laufer

said, "I just found out from the caucus that I'm the number one candidate that has knocked on the number one amount of doors myself."

In a Facebook post, Squire said his campaign knocked on 12,097 doors, in addition to making 6,367 phone calls and sending 7,485 personal letters.

Hudson told The Daily Progress she knocked on 40,000, but cautioned that, "doors aren't where real persuasion happens."

Instead, she said that her team's organizing campaign was more centered around 90 neighborhood house parties, which over 1,500 people attended.

Digital messaging can have an impact too, although social media engagement is harder to quantify.

Hudson had almost 2,000 more followers than Deeds on Twitter, but 10,000 less on Facebook.

Squire had a 2,000-follower ad-

vantage over Laufer on Twitter, and no one in the 54th District race had a significant social media following.

But do those follower numbers and a candidate's social media presence have any bearing on a race?

"My experience generally has been if you're a candidate you don't want to be too online. The online audience of Twitter is much more politically engaged than your average voter," said J. Miles Coleman, media relations coordinator at the University of Virginia Center for Politics.

In local races, where candidates have a smaller area to target, Coleman suggested candidates should meet people at coffee shops rather than tweet online.

"People like to say Twitter is not real life, and that's absolutely true," said Chaz Nuttycombe, director of CNalysis, a group that specializes in predicting state

legislative elections.

"But if you're talking about Democratic Primary, where it can be a little bit of real life is where you have a lot of liberal white people. Because that's a lot of Twitter," he said.

For that reason, Nuttycombe expected Laufer's attacks on Squire to backfire. Anecdotaly, he said he saw Laufer receiving criticism on Twitter and Facebook for mailers she released that questioned Squire's commitment to abortion access. But if those people on social media were actually upset with Laufer, not many of them voted.

The number that matters more than any — whether it be doors knocked, money raised or Tweets sent — is the vote total. Laufer won by 40 points.

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## Shooting

From A1

of his body.

There has been a recent uptick in gun violence in the Charlottesville area in the past six months.

According to the most recent figures, violent crime in Charlottesville was up a little more than 5% last year — and 30% over the past two years.

There has already been five homicide cases in the city since the start of the year. That number eclipses the tally in recent mem-

ory, according to current and former law enforcement authorities.

Charlottesville Police Chief Michael Kochis said earlier this year that the department was responding to one shots-fired call a day.

Under Kochis, who joined the force in mid-January, the police

department has been working to attract new staff and patrol communities more regularly in an effort to engage with the community and bring down the crime rate. Kochis has also floated a gun buyback program that the city is now considering — though opinions are mixed on whether such

programs are effective.

While police in surrounding Albemarle County have said that the recent rise in gun violence in the area is directly related to gang activity, police within Charlottesville city limits have routinely described the origins of the violence as "neighborhood beefs."

## Enhanced

From A1

outside forces that affect our industry and require us to make additional adjustments. Those outside forces include shifts in advertising trends, newsprint costs and the job market.

But even as we adjust to changing news habits and industry challenges, some things haven't changed: our commitment to local journalism, our rich storytelling and vivid photography, our intense focus on watchdog reporting that changes laws and improves lives, our relationship with the community.

So starting today, we're excited to share our new print product that includes some unique upgrades to your newspaper. Your Daily Progress launches today with new sections, new features and the kind of in-depth journalism that you've come to expect from our award-winning staff.

You'll still get the same 24/7/365 local news coverage you've come to expect from

our journalists. But starting today, our up-to-the-minute coverage across all of our digital platforms will be complemented by an expanded print edition that's available three days each week. For you, that means each time you pick up your newspaper, it'll feel — and read — like a traditional Sunday edition. It will arrive at your home, or be available for purchase at your favorite store, three days each week — Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

So what's new? Let's walk you through our new sections and some of our favorite new features:

**A Section:** The best of local news with a focus on enterprise reporting that goes beyond traditional next-day coverage of events and issues. This first section will also feature local business news, opinion, weather, obituaries and a recap of important local news stories from the past couple of days to quickly catch you up on anything you might've missed since your last print edition was delivered.

**360:** It's our new national and international news section. This vibrant report includes the most important stories from around the world, as well as compelling new features such as a photo page of "Today in History," fact-checking reports on news topics, environment and climate reporting from our staff meteorologists and more.

**Sports:** The best of local and national sports. We'll bring back expanded sports event schedules, standings, game recaps and a "Today in Sports History" page that'll give you plenty of water-cooler conversation items.

**Lively:** The best of lifestyles content like food, health, home, entertainment, what to watch on TV, horoscopes and advice and, of course, your favorite comics and puzzles. On Saturdays, you'll get our bonus Parade magazine page.

In addition to these print edition upgrades, we'll continue providing our elec-

tronic replica of the print edition, called the E-edition, seven days per week. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, the E-Edition will mirror the print newspaper you receive at home or pick up at the store. On the non-print days — Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays — your E-Edition will include the most important news of the day — local, national, international, sports — and your comics, puzzles and advice columns, but it will be a condensed version of our traditional daily news report.

Through all these changes, we will remain the top destination for local news, delivered on our website, through our app and on our newsletters and social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Speaking of, have you checked out our app? If not, please make sure you familiarize yourself with all of the ways you can get the best of Charlottesville and Central Virginia news, anywhere, anytime.

I hope you'll dig in today

and in the coming days and weeks to your new and improved print newspaper. And as you do, just remember that what's most important about The Daily Progress remains unchanged: We're

still a team of dedicated local journalists who put our readers first.

Thank you for supporting The Daily Progress. We're here, as we've always been, to serve you.

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