

Manassas fixture J.E. Rice Co. sells to Pitkins Hardware

» BY BEN PETERS
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The family behind the J.E. Rice Co. hardware store, a longtime staple in the Manassas community, recently sold the business to a fellow Prince William tool shop-owning family after nearly a century of ownership.

The business, run by brothers Steve, Jamie and Chase Rice, was sold to legacy hardware store owners Amy Pitkin-Monroe and Sarah Pitkin. They're the daughters of Tom Pitkin, who opened Pitkin's Hardware in Dale City in 1978, and they own a few other stores in the area, according to the Prince William County Historical Society.

The Pitkins took control of the J.E. Rice store July 1 and rebranded it Rice Ace Hardware. It will remain open for longer hours than under the Rice family's ownership.

In a video posted to the store's Facebook Page in late June, Jamie Rice celebrated the sale as beneficial to both his family and the community.

"It's going to be a good thing," he said. "It's going to be a good thing for the community. It's going to be a good thing for the shopping center. [The Pitkins are] very active in the community. They're a proven commodity with all their existing stores ... it's going to be win-win."

He and his brothers decided to hang up their hammers after years of leadership.



James "Pappy" Rice founded J.E. Rice Co. in 1936.
J.E. RICE CO.

"For us - it's time," Jamie Rice said. "We could make it go a little bit longer, but we've been working with our hearts more than our heads for quite some time now, and it's time to hand over the reins. The hardest thing is, again, saying goodbye to what has been an intimate relationship with the community."

Jamie Rice said he regrets such a sudden departure, but noted they couldn't notify the community sooner because they were under a non-disclosure agreement as the sale was pending.

J.E. Rice, located on Mathis Avenue near the intersection of Sudley and Centreville roads, was founded by the brothers' grandfather, James "Pappy" Rice, in



Steve and Jamie Rice, pictured here, sold J.E. Rice Co. to Pitkins Hardware in June.

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post-depression 1936.

"My grandfather had a very simple business model: Make the customer happy, whatever it took," Jamie Rice said in the video. "If there's such a thing as a people-pleasing gene, he had it, and I'd like to think the apples didn't fall too far from the tree. He set the bar awful high."

Jamie Rice said his father took over business from their grandfather, making he and his brothers third-generation own-

ers of a shop that became a community gathering place where customers sometimes came by just to hang out and chat.

"We can't thank the entire community enough for making J.E. Rices a favorite stop of theirs," Rice said. "And obviously I've said it a million times: It takes two to tango, and you guys have given us everything over the years, and we've tried to give you back everything you've given us, so that's what a community is all about."



During an event at Northrop Grumman's global headquarters Tuesday, officials signed a memorandum of understanding to show support for expanding the semiconductor industry in Virginia.

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Warner, Youngkin lead semiconductor conference

Bipartisan duo say Va. needs more incentives

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Gov. Glenn Youngkin and U.S. Sen. Mark Warner on Tuesday headlined a semiconductor conference in Fairfax County to convince global industry leaders to bring more microchip manufacturers to Virginia, a state they say offers lucrative incentives.

While Virginia is already home to major players in the semiconductor industry like the Manassas-based Micron Technology Inc., both Warner and Youngkin acknowledged the state is lagging behind others that have made substantial investments in microchips, noting Ohio with Intel's expansion thanks to the help of public incentives.

The two framed Virginia as being in a race against other states to build out the industry from top to bottom with robust workforce talent, research and development and deep supply chains.

"We must go fast, breaking technology barriers and doing it in a way that leads the world," Youngkin, a Republican, said.

Both statewide officeholders recognized the need for the state to expand its financial incentives for private companies to invest, and Youngkin said his administration is in the process of developing a package. But they also said Virginia already offers a number of key built-in attractions, including its proximity to the federal government, a robust slate of public and private universities, the country's defense contracting hub and a leading cargo port.

The event, held at Northrop Grumman's global headquarters, was hosted in partnership with Virginia Tech University to tout the grant-funded Virginia Alliance of Semiconductor Technology program that seeks to build public-private partnerships to buff out the industry that manufactures microcomputers that power everything from smartphones and cars to kitchen appliances and defense weapons.

The program will enroll 300 graduate

students each year at the school's Alexandria innovation campus and build a pipeline for them to enter the semiconductor industry.

"Leveraging the Innovation campus where we can bring in other research opportunities with that proximity to Congress, proximity to the intel community, proximity to defense, proximity to aerospace gives us a leg up," Warner, a Democrat and former governor, said.

The event came on the heels of a recent incentive package approved by Congress -- which Warner played a central role in crafting -- that will fund new and existing semiconductor manufacturing facilities.

Expanding microchip manufacturing in Virginia is part of a broader national effort to reduce the country's reliance on foreign countries, namely Taiwan, for their production. The movement is closely intertwined with what officials say is protecting national security in the face of China, which leaders fear could attempt to mount a takeover of Taiwan in the future.

"As we are engaged in an economic challenge of a lifetime, particularly vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China, national security is really about who is going to maintain technology dominance in a whole series of domains," Warner said.

It seems unlikely that large new manufacturing facilities would be located in Northern Virginia given the amount of land needed for such developments, but Youngkin said there are plenty of smaller parcels available for different elements of the supply chain.

The governor said there is land in south central Virginia, near Hampton Roads and around the Richmond area his administration is working to have ready-made for potential developers to build larger structures on.

"We still have a lot of progress to make" to ready land for companies that want to build facilities with quick turnaround, Youngkin said. Having land prepped for development "is a compelling, compelling factor in the site selection decisions that are being made," he said.



Black business leaders met with Democratic U.S. Rep. Abigail Spanberger and Prince William County officials in Woodbridge on Aug. 4 to discuss the hurdles they face. **BEN PETERS | INSIDENOVA**

Black business owners voice unique challenges

Spanberger hosts roundtable at Woodbridge's epiQ food hall

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Black business owners who met with Democratic U.S. Rep. Abigail Spanberger and Prince William County officials last week made clear they want a more prominent seat at the table to address the unique challenges they face.

"We need invites," Jinnae Monroe, a veteran and founder of the nonprofit Hire-Ground, which provides students with workforce development opportunities, said of the need to place more Black people in positions of power to advocate for their community. She received an ovation from the other business leaders at the Aug. 4 gathering.

Monroe said she has served on local, state and federal-level organizations, but indicated she often felt singled out because of her skin color. "It would be nice to not be the one," she said.

Many expressed concerns about affordable housing that make it difficult for both Black entrepreneurs and other people of color to live and work in Prince William.

Business leaders were also alarmed by attacks on affirmative action at the federal level in light of the Supreme Court ruling it illegal in a recent landmark decision.

"Recognizing and supporting and celebrating Black business owners across Virginia is something I am always keen to do," Spanberger said.

She continued, "There are particular challenges that Black business owners face, and so hearing directly from community members in this roundtable, being able to answer their questions, talk to some of the federal business legislation that I have voted for and helped pass and the impact that it has had and should have had on business owners like those remains a priority."

The roundtable discussion, held in honor of National Black Business Month in August at epiQ Food Hall in Woodbridge, included Black business and nonprofit leaders in Prince William County, including representatives from the Virginia Black Business Directory and Northern Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce.

Potomac and Neabsco District super-



The roundtable included representatives from the Virginia Black Business Directory and Northern Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce. **BEN PETERS | INSIDENOVA**

visors Andrea Bailey and Victory Angry, both of whom are Black, were also in attendance and spoke alongside Spanberger in addressing business leaders' concerns.

Spanberger said Woodbridge Supervisor Margaret Franklin made a brief appearance before the event began but left to avoid violating open meeting laws since the two other supervisors were in attendance.

Addressing Monroe's comments about lack of Black representation in business, Bailey said Prince William is in the midst of a "paradigm shift" in its attitude toward diversity, backed by support from Spanberger's office.

"Your point is very well taken," Bailey said. "Having your voice at the table, but also at the funding table – that has not happened."

Spanberger and those in attendance voiced concerns about Black residents' ability to access federal money to help get businesses off the ground, as Black people are disproportionately turned down for business loans.

Spanberger said she is committed to providing federal funding for Black businesses.

Bailey touted the growing partnership between Prince William County officials and Spanberger, who is relatively new to representing the county following redistricting. Spanberger recently invited local officials to a training event on how to apply for business grants so they could impart that knowledge on constituents.

"We want to make sure we have hit the ground running since I was sworn into the 118th Congress just this past January so that the communities that are newly represented by me know how to access the resources we provide," Spanberger said.