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CONTENTS



54

The Winter Walk of Lights at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens features glowing butterflies, flowers, and other nature-themed dazzle.

FEATURES

40

Stopping Armageddon

By Andrew Zaleski

Our solar system contains tens of thousands of potentially dangerous asteroids. A single strike could wipe out an entire city, or worse. A NASA office is leading efforts to spot and neutralize Earth-bound threats—before it's too late.

48

The DC Restaurant Trump Slump

By Jessica Sidman

Business is down. The vibes are tense. President Trump claims the local dining scene is "booming" since his return to the White House—but insiders tell a different story.

54

Happier Holidays

By *Washingtonian* Staff

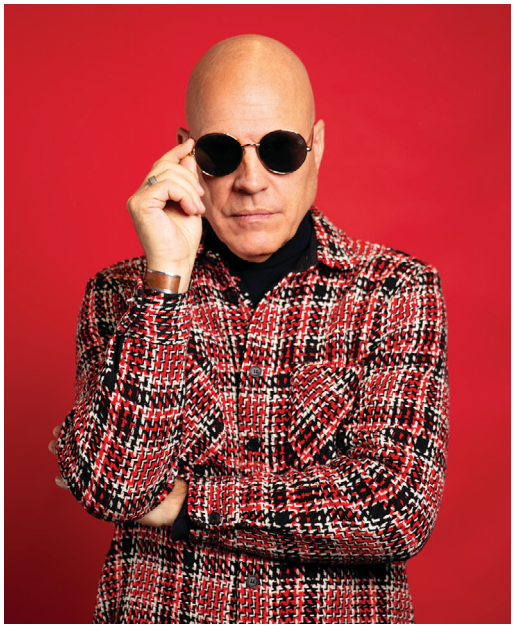
Stroll through light displays, go ice-skating, turn up the festive songs. Here's a guide to making the most of the season—whether you're embracing traditions, starting new ones, or even letting go of expectations.

This page
Photograph courtesy of NOVA Parks

On the cover
Photograph by Scott Suchman; styling by Giulietta Pinna at Limonata

CONTENTS

Volume 61 • Number 3

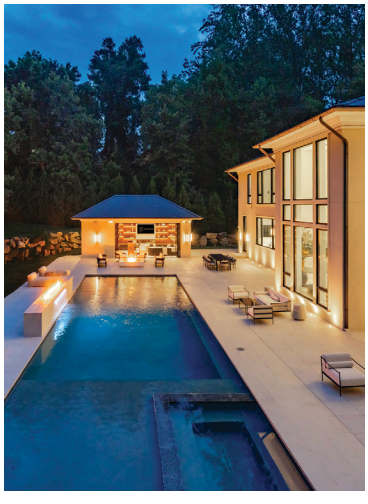


33

After 25 years as the *Post's* food critic, Tom Sietsema can take off his disguises.

138

Who bought this 21,800-square-foot house in McLean—with a heated marble pool—for $27.5 million?



110

Bread Furst in Van Ness is one of our readers' favorite bakeries.



DEPARTMENTS

CAPITAL COMMENT

11 Why is "pearl-clutching" suddenly a popular phrase? . . . A podcast on the history of LGBTQ+ bars . . . Millie's cries foul . . . Sidwell Friends' tennis coach has a tricky side gig . . . Remember all those panda statues?

22 BIG PICTURE
This year's 17th Street High Heel Race offered a Claus for celebration.

THINGS TO DO

30 Our ten picks for the month in culture.

IQ

33 HANGING UP HIS FORK
Longtime *Washington Post* restaurant critic Tom Sietsema says goodbye—and reveals his face.

36 STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE
How do you recover from a particularly dark period in your life? Invite Sally Quinn over for a dinner party.

LIFE & SHOPPING

71 GIFT GUIDE
67 great holiday presents you can buy locally. Plus, tips on giving the best gifts.

80 DOING GOOD
Looking to make a donation with local impact? These 21 nonprofits are highly recommended.

82 AN IMPERFECT MARRIAGE?
Some couples are turning to ChatGPT and other AI tools to help navigate a divorce. Here's why that's not always a smart idea. Plus, the area's top divorce attorneys.

TASTE

103 DISHES OF THE YEAR
Brazilian bar snacks, baked Alaska, and 20 more of the greatest things our food critics ate in 2025.

110 THE VOTES ARE IN
For the 48th year, our readers told us their favorite places to eat.

114 HIDDEN EATS
Two new Himalayan spots are heating up the H Street food scene.

HOME

116 NEIGHBORHOOD BRIEFING: TYSONS AND VIENNA
New places to eat, shop, and play in the neighboring Virginia suburbs.

138 OFF THE MARKET
Some of the region's recent high-end residential transactions.

IN EVERY ISSUE

8 FEEDBACK

144 FIRST PERSON
PBS journalist Ali Rogin—whose father is Bruce Springsteen's drummer—talks about growing up in a rock-and-roll family.

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY MAGDALENA PAPAIOANNOU; MIDDLE COURTESY OF HEIDER REAL ESTATE AND NIBLOCK STUDIOS; BOTTOM BY SCOTT SUCHMAN

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WE ASKED OUR STAFF:

Who would be your dream dinner guest?

WASHINGTONIAN

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"Dolly Parton. She seems so kind and like she would be a wonderful dinner guest."



"LeVar Burton. Like so many kids, I grew up watching *Reading Rainbow*. I'd love to hear his favorite book picks."



"Miss Piggy. I've always felt that we'd be great friends."



"Adam Sandler. One of the funniest human beings on the planet—he would absolutely light up the party."



"Shah Rukh Khan. He's Bollywood's biggest superstar, known for his charm and quick wit, who's been my absolute favorite as long as I can remember."



"Taylor Swift. A family party with her would be insane. Plus, she bakes! I'd love to try her sourdough or homemade pop-tarts."



"Conan O'Brien. I just wanna laugh again."

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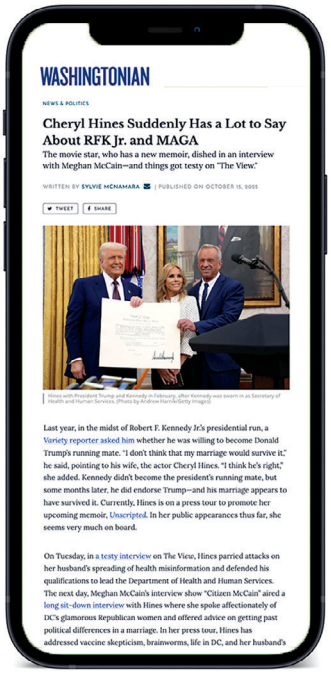
WASHINGTONIAN

NEWS & POLITICS

Cheryl Hines Suddenly Has a Lot to Say About RFK Jr. and MAGA

The movie star, who has a new memoir, dished in an interview with Meghan McCain—and things got testy on "The View."

WRITTEN BY SYLVIE MCNAMARA | PUBLISHED ON OCTOBER 15, 2025

TWEET SHARE

Hines with President Trump and Kennedy in February, after Kennedy was sworn in as Secretary of Health and Human Services. (Photo by Andrew Harnik/Getty Images)

Last year, in the midst of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s presidential run, a Variety reporter asked him whether he was willing to become Donald Trump's running mate. "I don't think that my marriage would survive it," he said, pointing to his wife, the actor Cheryl Hines. "I think he's right," she added. Kennedy didn't become the president's running mate, but some months later, he did endorse Trump—and his marriage appears to have survived it. Currently, Hines is on a press tour to promote her upcoming memoir, Unscripted. In her public appearances thus far, she seems very much on board.

On Tuesday, in a testy interview on The View, Hines parried attacks on her husband's spreading of health misinformation and defended his qualifications to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. The next day, Meghan McCain's interview show "Citizen McCain" aired a long sit-down interview with Hines where she spoke affectionately of DC's glamorous Republican women and offered advice on getting past political differences in a marriage. In her press tour, Hines has addressed vaccine skepticism, brainworms, life in DC, and her husband's

Curbed Enthusiasm

AFTER SUGGESTING LAST YEAR THAT her marriage to Robert F. Kennedy Jr. wouldn't survive if he were named Donald Trump's running mate, actor Cheryl Hines seems surprisingly comfortable in her new role as the wife of a Trump cabinet member. Hines is now on tour to publicize her memoir, *Unscripted.* In a web post, staff writer Sylvie McNamara broke down the former *Curb Your Enthusiasm* star's promotional appearances, where she has tended to waffle about—even defend—the MAGA movement she once harshly criticized. Commenters on Instagram were having none of it.

"If all the books in all the world were stacked to the moon, this would be on the bottom of my TBR pile." **–@ljscalzo**

"She looked pretty batty on The View. She's not ok." **–@tollxmar**

"Cheryl Hines sold her soul." **–@trudieboo**

" . . . @_cherylhines is one of them now. Hope summering in Hyannis Port (until they disowned him 😂) was worth it." **–@mariposa_3676**

"The dude is able to trick 70 million people into believing his lies. Of course he was able to trick one woman into believing he had substance. She's just too proud to admit she F'd up marrying him." **–@brianbarbermusic**

"May God protect me from becoming a sell out to wealth." **–@wendyand-chris_pohlhaus**

"Get Larry David in there, stat!" **–@no-planstudio**

"The Marvelous Mrs. Measles." **–@art-minsta**

CORRECTIONS

◆ Due to a computer error, November's Top Doctors list left off a number of top pediatricians. We apologize for the oversight. The following physicians should have been listed under Pediatrics: Ghassan N. Atiyeh, Maiya Clark, Catherine Cross, Pemmaraju Saleena Dakin, Dinea DeSouza, Michael J. Donnelly, Shreelata Durbhakula, Sirisha A. Durbhakula, John D. Farrell, Kathleen M. Hawkins, Kirsten B. Hawkins, Christi G. Hay, Michael J. Hopper, Nadine Z. Idriss, Umesh Kodu, Bertha H. Koomson, Mindy J. Maggid, James E. Mattey, Ely Mouchahoir, Mona Rewari, Christopher N. Rossbach, Joanna M. Sexter, Holly Spanier, Elizabeth Anne Valois, and Peter Warfield. The full corrected list is at *washingtonian.com/topdoctors.*

◆ Because of an editing error in November's "The Pen Is Mighty," autograph verifier Steve Zarelli was incorrectly called Charles Zarelli, and in a second reference, photographer Charles Hamilton was misidentified as Steve Hamilton.

To comment on articles, send us your rant or rave at *washingtonian.com/feedback.* Comments may be edited.

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CAPITAL COMMENT



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String Theory

Why has "pearl-clutching" suddenly become such a popular phrase around DC?

By Sam Nicholson

YOU'D THINK EVERYONE IN WASHINGTON WAS WEARING PEARLS, given how frequently people are accused of grasping them these days. Saddened by the East Wing demolition? Well, "losers who are quick to criticize need to stop their pearl clutching," White House adviser **Stephen Cheung** said in October. Surprised **George Santos** was pardoned? He'd like you to know that he won't be "paying too much attention to the pearl-clutching" of his critics. Troubled by that racist Young Republican Telegram chat that leaked? "I refuse to join the pearl-clutching," JD Vance said after the outcry.

Dismissing one's critics as prissy pearl-clutchers is hardly new,

as anyone who's gotten into online political fights is well aware. But lately it seems to have graduated to the top levels of government. And it's not just MAGA: **Jasmine Crockett, John Fetterman,** and other Democrats have also thrown around the term. The phrase resonates because it's both effective and evocative, making your opponent look foolish while conjuring a very specific, funny image of an upper-crust socialite type who's scandalized—or pretending to be—by some supposed transgression.

"This phrase is an easy way to dismiss any kind of criticism," says **Deborah Tannen,** a professor in Georgetown University's linguistics department and author of *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words.* It's about "undermining your critics rather than taking them head-on." Tannen notes the phrase's tinge of misogyny—negatively connecting the target "with women, and—even more dismissable—women's association with trivial, frivolous baubles like a pearl necklace."

Patricia O'Conner and **Stewart Kellerman,** who run the language blog Grammarphobia, have done significant research on the phrase, and the earliest use they've found in the metaphorical sense is in a 1979 issue of the feminist magazine *Off Our Backs,* in which writer **Sheila Brown** describes the reactions of white women who have been accused of racism. The term has made other appearances over the years—on the 1990s show *In Living Color,* for example—but it was hardly ubiquitous. The first appearance we could find in the *Washington Post* came from columnist **Petula Dvorak,** who in 2011 described the "pearl-clutching and hand-wringing" reaction to an article she'd written about growing diversity in the suburbs. Actually, Dvorak was responsible for the second and third uses in the *Post* as well. Apparently, it gets its hooks in you.

These kinds of stock phrases are a familiar downside of internet discourse—atrophied language that people hear and repeat and amplify as a way of sounding smart without doing any real thinking. But pearl-clutching has caught on as a dodge because it's more useful than much of that received language: Properly wielded, it does seem to somewhat deflate criticism.

And it's a particularly potent weapon in Washington, where reserved establishment types are a fixture and it's not unheard of to see literal pearls dangling around prominent necks. "Pearls are a gem very much for this area," says **Jorge Adeler** of Adeler Jewelers in Great Falls. He notes their traditional popularity among First Ladies and other political figures, who often opt for a less ostentatious substitute for diamonds. As his daughter and business associate **Wendy Adeler Hall** puts it, "You can't show wealth in the political arena as comfortably as you would as a private citizen. Pearls are a more subtle way to adorn yourself."

Could the popularity of "pearl-clutching" change that? We asked **Jeremy Shepherd,** who runs the Association of American Pearls, to weigh in. "I definitely don't think people are going to stop wearing pearls because somebody says, 'Oh, dear, clutch your pearls,' " he insists. And Shepherd says the term doesn't bug him personally. "It's satire, but at the same time, it's calling out what pearls actually are: something that's like a pure-innocence beauty. There's nothing really to be offended by. You know, publicity is always good." W

A House to Die For

Marisa Kashino's buzzy novel satirizes DC real estate

MARISA KASHINO SPENT years covering local real estate as an editor at *Washingtonian* and the *Washington Post*. Now she's using that knowledge for her debut novel, *Best Offer Wins,* a satirical thriller about a DC publicist driven to extremes by the horrors of house hunting. It's already been optioned by Hulu for a TV series. We asked her to tell us how real life inspired the book.

A NUTSO MARKET

In 2021, Kashino bought a house in Cabin John amid a frenzied real-estate boom. Her own search was relatively painless, but the general atmosphere at the time got her thinking. "It struck me as surprising that nobody ever set a thriller within the context of a really competitive house hunt," she says. During that overheated time, Kashino heard tales of listings that got 60 offers, sold for hundreds of thousands over asking, and attracted around-the-block open-house lines. Those kinds of anecdotes informed the novel's wild plot.



PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURA METZLER PHOTOGRAPHY

A LOCAL FOCUS

The setting is crucial to the book, the author says. "When you think of cutthroat interactions [in Washington], maybe you think of wheeling and dealing in Congress. But that stuff happens in the neighborhoods here, too." As a reporter covering all of it, Kashino felt like the competition was particularly intense around DC, given the ruthlessly ambitious Beltway types her characters represent.

AN INSENSITIVITY SEND-UP

The main character, Margo, and her husband want to leave their Shaw apartment for a property in Bethesda for reasons that Kashino describes as "a composite of a lot of the reasons people move to Bethesda—great public schools, nice backyards, clean streets." Margo's desperation to move is fueled by attitudes common among residents of gentrified areas. "She's cavalier talking about some things in a transitioning neighborhood, like seeing unhoused people and hearing gunshots," Kashino says. "She doesn't pause to reflect on who was on the losing end of that gentrification."

A CITY SHE LOVES

Best Offer Wins is full of affectionate references to some of Kashino's favorite spots around the District, including Jane Jane, Causa, and the Royal. "Even though Margo wants to get out of DC and find her dream life in the suburbs," she says, "I did intend for the book to read in part like a love letter to the city." —KATE CORLISS

Return of a Guitar Great

Jorma Kaukonen plays an 85th-birthday concert in his hometown

JORMA KAUKONEN, THE RENOWNED GUI-tarist for Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna, is closely associated with San Francisco's music scene. But Kaukonen actually grew up in Chevy Chase DC, across the street from Lafayette Elementary. Both he and fellow Airplane and Hot Tuna member **Jack Casady**–who lived nearby–attended Alice Deal and Woodrow Wilson (now Jackson-Reed), and the duo got their professional start here, playing covers in local nightclubs.

Kaukonen was recently back in town for a concert at the Warner Theatre, a big celebration of his 85th birthday that included Casady. It seemed like a good moment to learn more about his somewhat surprising roots in upper Northwest DC, so we called him up to do a bit of reminiscing.

Kaukonen's dad was an Army linguist on **General Douglas MacArthur's** staff, and in the late 1940s, the family bought a home in the District. Kaukonen would hang out at the Broad Branch Market and Fort Reno. "In sixth grade, I was a crossing guard at the corner of Northampton Street and 33rd," he recalls. "Once a week, we had to wash our guard belts and iron them."

In the late 1950s, Kaukonen began playing guitar, initially drawn to popular music of the time like the **Everly Brothers.** He frequented the Guitar Shop on Connecticut Avenue, where he got his first Gibson J-45. He took lessons from the owner, **Sophocles Papas,** a classical guitarist who counted **Andrés Segovia** as a pal. "I think my taste in music repulsed him," Kaukonen says with a laugh.

Kaukonen and Casady became friends when they were still in school. They met because a girl he was friends with starting dating Casady's brother, Kaukonen says, "but it became apparent early on that Jack and I had a more profound common interest than dating the girl down the street. And that interest was music." They formed a high-school band called the Triumphs, which began scoring professional gigs. "Washington has always been a musical town," Kaukonen says. The high point of the Triumphs' career was backing up rockabilly star **Jimmy Clanton** at a gig in West Virginia, Kaukonen remembers.

Casady's family lived in a house on Reno Road, not far from Deal, and the two of them had their first-ever recording sessions in the basement rec room. In the summer of 1960, when Kaukonen was back in town from college, they recorded a bunch of blues tracks that are essentially proto-Hot Tuna. "Jack had a Wollensak reel-to-reel tape recorder before anybody else I knew had a tape recorder," the guitarist says. "He was just *waiting* to push the 'record' button." Kaukonen recently dipped deep into his archives and came up with an album's worth of those earliest recordings, which he released for the first time last year. The record's title: *Reno Road*.

Though Kaukonen and Casady soon found fame on the West Coast, they've performed regularly in the DC area for their entire careers. It always feels meaningful to come back, Kaukonen says: "I consider it my hometown." –MARK FINKELPEARL



Jorma Kaukonen (center) with Jack Casady (left) at Warner Theatre

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY EVY MAGES; BOTTOM BY JOSHUA BLANCHARD/ GETTY IMAGES FOR TACO BELL

Live Más

On November 29, fans of fitness and fast food gather for the Taco Bell DC 50K, which involves running an ultramarathon that's routed to hit nine of the area's Taco Bells. Competitors are required to eat something at each outlet—no Pepto permitted.



Raising the Bar

A podcast on the history of LGBTQ establishments in DC

AFTER ABBY STUCKRATH LEARNED that the *Washington Blade* is the oldest LGBTQ newspaper in the country, she began digging into its archives for glimpses of gay life in decades past. The research eventually led her to DC's Rainbow History Project, where she kept seeing the names of certain bars and clubs: now-defunct spots such as the Brass Rail, the Showboat, and Phase One. Stuckrath, now a WTOP producer, and her sibling, **Ellie Stuckrath,** a nonprofit communications professional, had moved to DC from Colorado and were still searching for a sense of belonging in their new home. They decided to channel their casual research into an intriguing podcast, *Queering the District,* which recently completed its first season.

"DC is where I discovered myself and fell in love with the queer community," Abby says. "And then I fell in love with the history here." The first group of episodes, they decided, would be about bars and clubs—for decades, the only public places where LGBTQ people could safely gather and let loose.

The podcast format allows the siblings to capture voices of people who frequented some of the bars, such as veteran drag mother **Rayceen Pendarvis,** who recalls places like the Black Nugget, a 14th Street joint popular with sex workers, where singers in drag sometimes used live snakes and fire for routines on a cramped dance floor. Then there was Nob Hill, a Kenyon Street bar that catered to gay Black men and was sometimes called "the Wrinkle Room" because of its older crowd.

Another episode covers the Clubhouse, a beloved Petworth disco where joy mingled with grief on the dance floor as the AIDS epidemic killed many in the community. At this warehouse on Upshur Street, the party would begin at 1 AM, and revelers leaving the club in sequined outfits would pass people heading to church on Sunday morning. "I have never entered a space before and felt that sense of belonging that those people felt," Abby says.

Neither Abby nor Ellie is a big bar-goer; Ellie prefers to hang out at the DC Public Library. But the podcast has given them a new appreciation for queer nightlife, and they've been spending time lately at As You Are, the LGBTQ dance bar and cafe on Eighth Street, Southeast. The siblings came to DC at a particularly grim moment in its history, and the stories of toughness and exuberance they heard while making the episodes have given them perspective on all of it. "Hearing about the amount of activism that's been done in the District and the amount of life that's been endured in this place reminds me that other people have gone through really horrible times as well," Ellie says. "They had to be around each other because that's how they survived." —IKE ALLEN



Abby and Ellie Stuckrath, the siblings behind *Queering the District*



FAREWELL TO FOIE?

A ballot initiative to end its sale could be coming

An animal-welfare group called Pro-Animal Future is trying to get an initiative on DC ballots next November to ban the sale of foie gras, which is typically produced by force-feeding ducks or geese to engorge their livers. The DC Board of Elections has approved the Prohibiting Force-Feeding of Birds Act to proceed in the process. Pro-Animal will need to collect signatures from 5 percent of registered DC voters before it actually ends up on the ballot.

Foie gras is banned from commercial sale across California and a couple cities. "This is a uniquely cruel practice that I think a lot of people could agree is not a humane way to treat animals," says Pro-Animal spokesperson **Anvar Ruziev.** Under the initiative, retailers and restaurants that serve foie gras could be fined per violation and risk having their business license suspended. The measure would focus on commercial sales; individuals could still have foie gras for personal consumption.

One chef who opposes the idea is **Bart Hutchins** of the MAGA-friendly Capitol Hill spot Butterworth's. "The production of foie gras has been around since at least Rome, possibly before," he says. "If we can't appreciate these foodways that have been passed down for generations upon generations, everything's just going to become a chicken finger."

—JESSICA SIDMAN

PHOTOGRAPH ON LEFT COURTESY OF *QUEERING THE DISTRICT*; TOP BY DUKEII/GETTY IMAGES

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TOP DOCTOR WASHINGTONIAN 2025

Millie's Cries Foul

A new restaurant is remarkably similar to the popular DC eatery



The eateries' near-identical graphics

THE OWNERS OF THE SPRING VALLEY restaurant Millie's have accused the operators of the DC Greek hot spot Balos and its sister bistro, Bar Angie, of copying their merch, logo, menu items, and dining-room design for a restaurant—called Angie's—that's opening on Long Island this winter.

According to **Marisa Casey,** CEO of Georgetown Events Hospitality Group, which owns Millie's, one of the first things that grabbed her team's attention was a sweatshirt with a graphic of a Jeep Wagoneer that was posted on the Angie's Instagram page. The design is the same as the one Millie's has been using on its own merch since 2022. Angie's also posted a video featuring a rendering of the upcoming restaurant, which includes a wall decoration with various locations and how many miles away they are—a prominent decor element of both the DC Millie's and its sister restaurant in Nantucket. Then there was the Angie's logo, which was almost identical as well.

Angie's menu included many of the same dishes as Millie's, from lobster quesadillas to grilled swordfish kebabs. Most striking: Millie's offers a fried-chicken sandwich with sweet pickles and honey Dijon called Dionis, named after a Nantucket beach. The Long Island restaurant also had a fried-chicken sandwich with sweet pickles and honey Dijon called Dionis. Millie's has a tomato sandwich with basil mayo on multigrain bread called Summer House, named for a Nantucket hotel. So did Angie's. "It's just such a blatant rip-off, and it's just so concerning and sad that these guys are local," says Casey. "[The Balos partners] come to Millie's all the time. Apparently, they gave our hostesses cookies."

Joe Ragonese, co-owner of Angie's and Balos, acknowledges he's a fan of the Spring Valley restaurant: "Millie's is one of our favorite places. We go there." He says Balos has now taken down the merch, but he pushes back on the idea that it was ripping off the whole Millie's concept. "As similar as it gets is that it's a nautical feel on the north shore of Long Island," he says. "It's 80 percent the Bar Angie menu mixed in with tacos, which nobody owns. Since the beginning of time, you see things that you like at other places and you make an item better here and there." And the dishes named after Nantucket landmarks? "I'd have to look at that, I don't know," he says. "I understand where you're coming from on that one. I haven't seen it, so I don't know."

While no one can own a restaurant dish, Casey points out that some of the ingredient combinations on both the Angie's and Millie's menus are far from generic, such as seared-scallop tacos with house slaw, bacon, and blue cheese. "I feel for our chef," Casey says. "We put a lot of time and effort and care and creativity into everything we do. So, yeah, we're going to talk to our lawyers about it."

Within days of this story's publication online, Angie's posted an updated menu; the dishes are the same, but the Nantucket-inspired names are gone. The restaurant—due to open in December—also now has a different logo. —JESSICA SIDMAN



PHOTOGRAPH OF CATHEDRAL BY EVY MAGES

SAYING GOODBYE

Washington National Cathedral has long been a place where the nation bids farewell to its Presidents and political power players. But over the years, it has also hosted services for other notable Americans.

Jane Goodall, 2025

The November 12 funeral for the beloved primatologist and conservationist, known for her groundbreaking discoveries about chimpanzees, is the most recent example.

Ben Bradlee, 2014

The famed *Washington Post* editor, who oversaw the paper's coverage of the Watergate scandal, was honored with a funeral that attracted big names like **Joe Biden.**

Dorothy Height, 2010

Barack and Michelle Obama were among the many mourners for the civil- and women's-rights leader, who served for decades as president of the National Council of Negro Women.

Katharine Graham, 2001

Bradlee delivered one of six eulogies for the *Post* publisher, who guided the paper through the Pentagon Papers and Watergate investigations. **Bill and Hillary Clinton, Warren Buffett, Bill Gates,** and other prominent people attended.

Helen Keller, 1968

The disability-rights advocate, who was blind and deaf, was interred in the cathedral's Chapel of St. Joseph of Arimathea alongside her teacher, **Anne Sullivan,** who died in 1936.

—EMMA SULLIVAN

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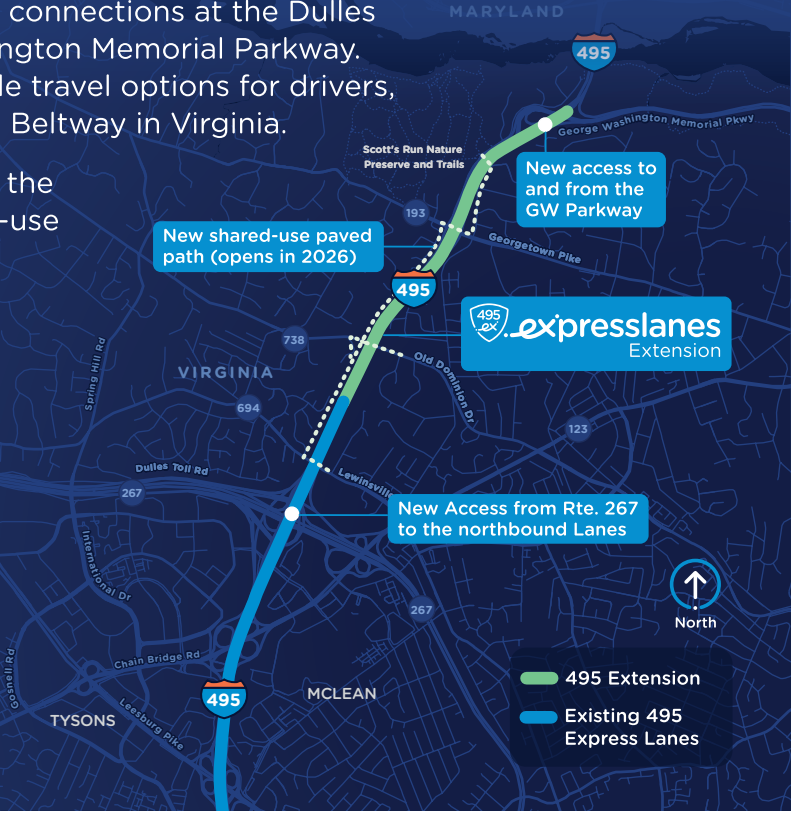
The 495 Express Lanes Extension opens November 22, adding 2.5 new miles of Express Lanes through the Tysons–McLean area, with direct connections at the Dulles Toll Road and the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The Extension will expand reliable travel options for drivers, carpoolers and bus riders on the Beltway in Virginia.

Beyond roadway improvements, the Extension also features a shared-use paved path that will enable new opportunities for walking and cycling in 2026.



Learn more at
ExpressLanes.com/495Extension



Logan West left a law career to coach.

Courting Attention

Sidwell Friends' tennis coach has a side gig performing wild trick shots

HOW MANY TIMES IN A ROW CAN YOU bounce a tennis ball off the side of a racquet frame? I tried it recently, and the answer, I am sad to report, was three. **Logan West's** record is 1,229. West is a rising star in the esoteric world of freestyle tennis, which involves perfecting ludicrously difficult trick shots. If you've been to the US Open, Wimbledon, or the Australian Open lately, you might have seen him performing for crowds of onlookers.

He also happens to be a serious tennis professional, overseeing the tennis program at Sidwell Friends for the past decade. The girls' varsity team recently won its sixth straight championship, and the boys' team took its own sixth championship last spring. This fall, West was named high-school coach of the year by the Racquet Sports Professionals Association. I caught up with him recently in his office in an athletic facility hidden underneath the football field, where he sipped chai and explained how he went from a law career to tennis coaching to minor online fame for his trick shots.

West is himself a Sidwell grad, a former star player for the school's tennis team. Growing up in Georgetown, he was introduced to the sport by his father, who worked for the World Bank, and fell in love with it, hitting balls in Georgetown's Rose Park until his hands sprouted blisters. By the time he started at Sidwell in fifth grade, he was taking it more seriously, working with a coach. In high school, he played for Sidwell's varsity team and on the USTA junior circuit.

West next followed the path of many Sidwell grads, to the Ivy League (Dartmouth, where he was on the tennis team) and law school (GW, which he finished in 2010). Rather than work at a firm, he got a job as in-house counsel for a company that owned DC nightclubs. Then he and some partners ended up opening their own club, the Huxley, in Dupont Circle. **LeBron James** and **Lil Jon** partied there; Thrillist named it DC's best club in 2013. West no longer spent much time thinking about his backhand.

But the Huxley didn't last, and West felt like he hadn't really found his calling. One day, he heard from his old Sidwell tennis coach, **Bill Budke.** Would he ever want to come help with the team? That sounded kind of fun—get back on the court and get some exercise. He signed on as a part-time assistant coach, and it ended up having a bigger effect on him than he imagined. "You realize they're soaking up everything you tell them and implementing it," says West, who lives with his wife and two kids on Capitol Hill. "I enjoyed law, I enjoyed hospitality, but I hadn't found that career where it all clicked." West was named Sidwell's head tennis coach in 2016; his teams have now won 12 conference championships and ten state championships.

The freestyle thing started during the early days of the pandemic, when even outdoor courts were locked down. The Tennis Channel, starved for content, began airing videos that viewers sent in, and West made one of a trick serve he'd been working on, which involved bouncing the racquet off the ground. (You can see it on his Instagram, @wolverinewest.) The Tennis Channel featured the clip, and it went viral. ("This is *super* impressive," said one Tennis Channel host when they showed it.) So West kept developing tricks and sharing videos, and now companies such as Babolat and Asics fly him around the world for demonstrations. "I certainly didn't think when I graduated from Sidwell or Dartmouth or GW Law—or passed the bar and started to practice—that this was where I was going to end up," he says. "But I couldn't be happier. I'm in a place where I'm supposed to be." —ROB BRUNNER

43 percent

That's the median number of unsold tickets in the Kennedy Center's three largest halls between September 3 and October 19, according to data analyzed by the *Washington Post*. It's a huge drop from recent years, likely due to Trump's takeover.



TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY EVY MAGES; BOTTOM BY CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES



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REMEMBER THESE?

In 2004, artists made 150 panda statues that were scattered across DC as part of PandaMania, a public art project that captured the city's imagination. Where did they all go? DC resident **Hector Biaggi** is trying to track them down, and so far he's found about 60. Here are a few. —EMMA SULLIVAN

SANDIE BACON'S "PANDACHINE"
The robot-themed panda, first displayed at the National Air and Space Museum, has found a new home in an outdoor area at MedStar Washington Hospital Center.

DAVID CIOMMO'S "FOR A LIVING PLANET"
Now in the World Wildlife Fund's lobby, it's painted like the Earth with two puzzle pieces missing to show the conservation work still ahead.

EMILY TELLEZ'S "PANDILLUSION"
Its black-and-white lines create a liminal effect highlighting two concentric silhouettes of smaller pandas. Originally displayed outside a downtown jewelry store, it's at Lillie's Italian Restaurant in Woodley Park today.

TYRONE "TIPY" TAYLOR'S "WORLD WIDE PANDA"
America Online sponsored this one, which is why it's painted in this "futuristic" style. Its prior location, Mazza Gallerie, is no more. These days, the statue is outside nearby Friendship Gourmet Market.

AMY GOODSTINE AND BRANDON BLOCH'S "CHINA DOLL"
Once by the Warner Theatre, it now stands outside the Google building at Reston Metro Center. The bear is dressed like a Chinese empress and decorated with flowers and butterflies.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY HECTOR BIAGGI



Guest List

A monthly roundup of people we'd like to have over for drinks, food, and conversation



Pixie Windsor

She just shut her beloved shop, Miss Pixie's, but is still selling cool vintage items online.

Kenny Iko

A DC singer, he turned heads as a performer on this season of *The Voice*.

Taraji P. Henson

The DC-native actor's foundation is helping bring a new community center and wellness hub to Temple Hills.

Lamont Carey

He's been named head of the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs.

Isaac Stein

The furloughed IRS attorney has used the shutdown to open a fun hot-dog stand.

DISINVITED!



Dan Quinn

With DC's NFL team back to stinking, its well-liked coach is on the hot seat. Sure, it's not all his fault. But frustrated fans need to blame somebody!

PHOTOGRAPH OF WINDSOR BY EVY MAGES; IKO BY DANNY VENTRELLA/NBC; HENSON BY MICHAEL LOCCISANO/GETTY IMAGES; QUINN BY SCOTT TAETSCH/GETTY IMAGES; OTHERS COURTESY OF SUBJECTS

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Claus for Celebration

YES, YOU'RE READING THE DECEMBER issue of *Washingtonian,* but this is not a Christmas photo—Santas notwithstanding. It was actually taken at this year's 17th Street High Heel Race, a Halloween-week tradition now in its 38th year. The costumed Clauses—in heels, naturally—were participants in the competition, which took place on October 28. In the end, this year's winner wasn't a Santa but rather a Lady Liberty. "This is America, land of the free, home of the brave," the victor told a TV reporter. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of fabulousness."

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVY MAGES



Dan About Town

Party photographer Dan Swartz's monthly roundup of bashes, balls, and benefits

▼ Therme Group's Bathe-ing DC Block Party VIP Event at Sandlot Anacostia

October 17



Sandlot Anacostia's Ian Callender (second from left) with Robert Hammond, Wanda Lockridge, and Adam Bamba Tanaka of Therme Group US

▼ The Greater Washington Board of Trade's Fall Business Classic at Signal House

October 9



WMATA's Randy Clarke and the Greater Washington Board of Trade's Jack McDougle



DC Council member Kenyan R. McDuffie, Virginia Ali of Ben's Chili Bowl, and Brandon Todd of Washington Gas



Rumela Das and Eddy Peters of Bank of America

▼ Singing Tiger Grand Opening at Hotel Nell

October 22



Aaron Black of Charlestowne Hotels, Gerald Richardson and Bernard Sales of Singing Tiger, and Brook Rose of Brook Rose Development

▼ Mozambique Fundraiser With Just Ice Tea at Philippe Chow DC

October 20



Chena Morrison of Philippe Chow, Hiba Bittar of MoKi Media, Andréa Vieira of Nailsaloon, and philanthropist Luma Hakki



Just Ice Tea cofounders Seth Goldman (left) and Spike Mendelsohn (far right) with Tiffany Nesfield of Nesfield Performance and George Forman of Philippe Chow DC

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL SWARTZ

▾ 57th Annual Meridian Ball at Meridian International Center
October 24



US special representative for global partnerships Paolo Zampolli and Ana Delgado, ambassador of Panama to the Organization of American States



Susanna Quinn, Jocelyn Quinn, deputy chief of staff to the Vice President Jim Durrett, former White House social secretary Rickie Niceta, and deputy White House social secretary Nicole Butler



Meridian International Center's Stuart Holliday, Gwen Holliday, Sela Thompson Collins, and theGROUP's Art Collins

▾ Chefs for Equality Dinner at Cut by Wolfgang Puck
October 27



Former *Washington Post* food critic Tom Sietsema, Chefs for Equality creator David Hagedorn, and chef Wolfgang Puck



Restaurateur Bryan Voltaggio, Andrew Ho of Cut by Wolfgang Puck, Amy Brandwein of Centrolina and Piccolina, and Anthony Jones of Marcus DC



Tony Mosca of Rosewood Washington, D.C., Elise Lefkowitz, and Marc Lefkowitz

▾ RIAA Honors at the Recording Industry Association of America HQ
October 29



RIAA's Mitch Glazier (left) and Michele Ballantyne (second from right) with musicians Lauren Daigle and Jon Batiste

▾ The Walt Disney Company's DC Office Space Open House at Capitol View
October 30



Disney's Jessica Moore and Jaqui Serrano

WASHINGTONIAN 2025 TECH TITANS RECEPTION

On October 15, leaders and innovators in technology gathered at Fish Shop in DC for a lively evening celebrating *Washingtonian's* 2025 Tech Titans. At the reception, presented by Intuit, honorees and guests mingled over craft cocktails, delicious bites, and upbeat music from Mixing Maryland. Washington Talent Agency captured custom keepsake photos at the *Washingtonian* cover station.

Washingtonian president and CEO Catherine Merrill kicked off the evening with a toast before introducing the speakers: Michael Kennedy, senior vice president and chief corporate-affairs officer at Intuit; Teresa Carlson, founding president of General Catalyst Institute; and Mario Acosta-Velez, senior director of local engagement and corporate social responsibility at Verizon. Each shared insights on how their organizations are driving innovation and investing in the future of technology.

Thank you to our partners: **Fish Shop, Lee's Flower Shop, Mixing Maryland, Olivia Macaron,** and **Washington Talent Agency.**

Photographs by Daniel Swartz and Evy Mages

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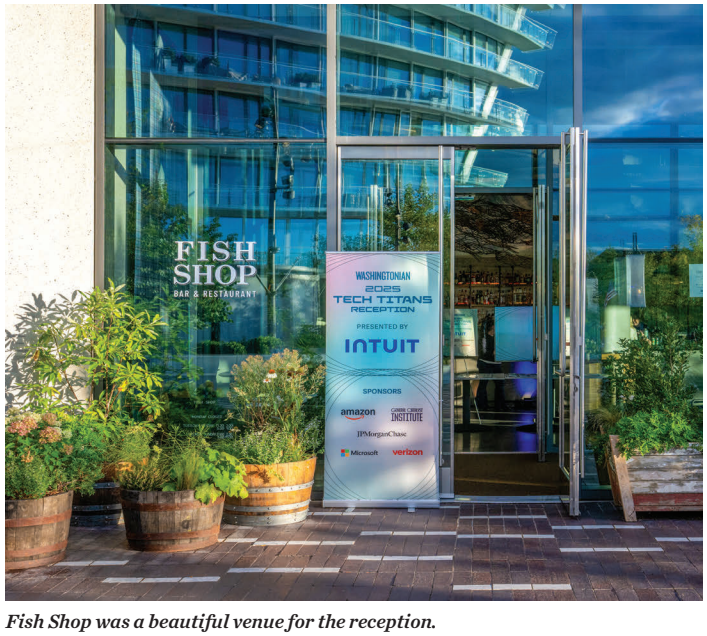
Fish Shop's tuna-tartare tots



Senator Amy Klobuchar and Intuit's Michael Kennedy



Fish Shop was a beautiful venue for the reception.



André Pienaar of C5 Capital and Teresa Carlson of General Catalyst Institute



Todd Klein of Revolution Growth, Zach Leonsis of Monumental Sports & Entertainment, and Tige Savage of Revolution Ventures



Maryam Mujica and Charlotte Rock of the General Catalyst Institute with Nichole Clagett of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency



Lauren Stack of HyperSpectral, Vince Lubsey of HyperSpectral, and Vivienne Pham of J.P. Morgan



The Amazon team: Jena Gross, Erin Cohan, Steve Hartell, Liz Richardson, Patrick Phillipi, Ashleigh de la Torre, and Lisa Kohn



Bryson Bort of Scythe, Brooklyn Graham and Sarah Stewart of Silverado Policy Accelerator, and Dereck Chapman of Micron Technology



Kathy Grillo and Mario Acosta-Velez of Verizon



Nyat Fessehaye of J.P. Morgan and Sophie Ceniza of EqualAI



TJ Leonard of Storyblocks and Michael Avon of ABS Capital



Kacey Schneider of Intuit, Stoney Burke of Aquia Group, and Jamie Dattilo of De Novo Projects



Alexandra Reeve Givens of the Center for Democracy and Technology, Etoulia Burnett of Howard University's Center for Digital Business, and Erin Horne McKinney of the DC Innovation & Technology Inclusion Council

WASHINGTONIAN

Style Setters

On October 7, *Washingtonian* welcomed our 2025 Style Setters as well as past honorees for an exclusive dinner at Casamara. Guests were greeted by an atmosphere of refined elegance, where they savored artisanal cocktails and captured memorable moments at the glambooth before dinner.

Washingtonian fashion and weddings editor Amy Moeller made remarks celebrating this year's Style Setters before the three-course culinary experience, set against a tablescape adorned with exquisite floral arrangements designed by Dana Hall, founder of Lushnics Luxury Events.

Sincerest thanks to **Casamara** and our vendor partners, **Lushnics Luxury Events** and **Photoshoot Fresh,** for an evening of unparalleled sophistication.

Photographs by Sophie Macaluso



A tablescape by Lushnics Luxury Events



Style Setters James Harris and Sena Fitzmaurice at the photo booth



Casamara's spaghetti pomodoro



2025 Style Setters James Harris, Sena Fizmaurice, Paula Dhier, Olivia Igbokwe-Curry, Jack Howard, Eun Yang, and Paola Velez

GREATER WASHINGTON

Board of Trade

Fall Business Classic

The Greater Washington Board of Trade hosted nearly 500 of the region's most dynamic leaders at Signal House in Union Market for its Fall Business Classic, presented by Atlantic Union Bank. The event sparked meaningful conversations, forged new connections, and opened the door to future collaboration across our region.

Since 1889, the Board of Trade has been at the center of the Washington area's development by helping shape regional transportation, elevating iconic entertainment venues, and pushing forward economic opportunities. That spirit of collaboration continues to guide us today as we work to strengthen our community and drive inclusive growth.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and our sponsors for powering this success. You can see highlights of the evening at *www.boardoftrade.org*.

Together, let's keep building momentum and leading the way for Greater Washington!

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WELLS FARGO



The Greater Washington Board of Trade's Jack McDougle, Jeremy Blank of Deloitte ('25 Chair), and Courtney Spaeth of Growth[Period]



Turning Rock Partners' Erin Andrew with Western Transportation Group's Corby Lawrence



Jay O'Brien of Atlantic Union Bank and the Board of Trade's Jack McDougle



The Board of Trade's George Longwell with, from left, Suzette Stevenson and Felis Andrade of Giant Food and Virginia Ali and Vida Ali of Ben's Chili Bowl



Mike Sachtleben and Charles Conner of MedStar Health with Rosie Allen-Herring of United Way National Capital Area ('21 Chair)

THINGS TO DO

Our 10 picks for the month in culture

By Pat Padua



MUSIC

DIJON

THE FILLMORE
December 5
Ellicott City native Dijon Duenas has worked with luminaries such as Charli XCX and Bon Iver and performed in the duo Abhi/Dijon, a project formed at UMBC. This performance comes hot off his acting debut in *One Battle After Another* and his acclaimed sophomore solo album, *Baby,* an experimental-but-accessible slice of moody R&B.

BOOKS

PATTI SMITH



LINCOLN THEATRE
December 19
The renowned musician and author reads from her latest memoir, *Bread of Angels,* which she has described, intriguingly, as "a bright and dark dance of life." It explores her postwar childhood and teen years, her marriage to MC5 guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith, and other aspects of a fascinating life.



MUSIC

BRIDGE TO BEETHOVEN

KENNEDY CENTER
December 4
Violinist Jennifer Koh—who runs the Kennedy Center's Fortas Chamber Music Concerts—draws a line from the classics to the modern era, performing a pair of Beethoven sonatas along with jazz composer Vijay Iyer's "Bridgetower Fantasy," written about the little-known Afro-European violinist who inspired the Kreutzer Sonata.



THEATER

AMM(I)GONE

CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
December 4–6
Created and performed by Pakistani American theater director Adil Mansoor, this play adapts *Antigone,* the Sophocles classic of generational tension, to address a personal journey that started when Mansoor came out to his mother.

PHOTOGRAPH OF KOH BY JUERGEN FRANK; *AMM(I)GONE* BY JULIETA CERVANTES

MUSIC

JAY SOM



THE ATLANTIS
December 8
With her first album in six years, the Filipino American singer-songwriter follows a successful 2023 tour playing bass for Boygenius. *Belong* continues her tradition of wistful dream pop, soaring yet intimate, a perfect fit for the cozy Atlantis.



PHOTOGRAPH OF *IN CLAY* COURTESY OF SIGNATURE THEATRE; GARDNER BY LEE STALSWORTH © 2023 RUTH ORKIN PHOTO ARCHIVE/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY; FEDERMAN AND TUPPER BY GENTL AND HYERS

THEATER

IN CLAY

SIGNATURE THEATRE
December 9–February 1
This new musical emerged from lockdown, when lyricist Rebecca Simmonds and composer-lyricist Jack Miles got interested in the work of real-life French potter Marie-Berthe Cazin. *In Clay,* which is making its American premiere, brings audiences to 1930s Paris to learn about her story.

THEATER

RULES FOR LIVING

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE
December 3
British playwright Sam Holcroft's London hit gets its across-the-pond debut, depicting a Christmas dinner that spins all those awkward family moments into a seasonal meltdown you won't soon forget.



MUSEUMS

"RUTH ORKIN: WOMEN ON THE MOVE"



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS
December 12–March 29
The daughter of silent-film actress Mary Ruby, this photographer made images of Hollywood glamour, as with her portraits of Ava Gardner (above). But Orkin also trained her eye on ordinary women and families navigating postwar America. You can see both in this exhibit featuring 21 images from the museum's collection.

BOOKS

RUSS AND DAUGHTERS: 100 YEARS OF APPETIZING

SIXTH & I
December 1
The Lower East Side Jewish-food institution has served up some of New York's best-loved smoked fish for four generations. Co-owner cousins Niki Russ Federman and Josh Russ Tupper will discuss their new cookbook and provide a tasting menu of family staples.





MUSIC

THE BETHS

9:30 CLUB
December 9–10
The New Zealand jangle-pop band is promoting its excellent new album, *Straight Line Was a Lie*—yet another instantly hummable sampler of crunchy guitars and achingly melodic choruses. W


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IQ

IDEAS. ARGUMENTS. REPORTING.



Hanging Up His Fork

Longtime *Washington Post* restaurant critic Tom Sietsema says goodbye—and reveals his face

By Jessica Sidman

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAGDALENA PAPAIOANNOU



SWEET GIG: Sietsema shows off his dessert at the Occidental.

TOM SIETSEMA'S 25-YEAR REIGN AS food critic at the *Washington Post* came to an end in early October. He estimates that during his tenure he wrote 1,200 full reviews and 50 spring and fall dining guides, plus answered thousands of reader queries in his popular online chat. Sietsema was one of the longest-tenured full-time critics still reviewing restaurants in America. His term just barely exceeded that of his predecessor, Phyllis Richman, who was the *Post's* critic for 24 years.

As part of his exit, Sietsema publicly revealed his face for the first time. He was among a shrinking class of food critics who still attempted to remain anonymous—though most restaurateurs who cared about his reviews did recognize him. (Some even tracked his aliases and offered bonuses to staff who could spot him.) We chatted with Sietsema about his best disguises, his most memorable reviews, and what's next.

I'm sure you've heard a million times that you have a dream job. Why leave now?

Last year, I filed my 25th [fall] dining guide, and I thought if it all ended right now, I'd be fine. I've been able to travel and write stories that I thought were important and review all sorts of restaurants all over the place. But I stayed on.

I was in Portugal and I got this call from [then food editor] Joe Yonan, who said, "Hey, I didn't want you to be surprised, but the *Post* is offering buyouts." I thought, you know, I'm going to be 65—I might not get offered this kind of deal again. I thought I could use it as seed money for whatever else I wanted to do.

I was in Lisbon, having just been to the MAD Symposium [food conference], and José Andrés was giving a speech with René Redzepi. One of the things he said that I scribbled down was "Dream out loud." I know it sounds cliché and Oprah-esque and everything, but it was like, yeah, yeah, I've got to do that.

I will say, I feel I have been treated really well at the *Post*. I still believe in the brand. Every media [outlet] is suffering a lot right now, right? I wanted to leave. I don't want to be the bitter guy to leave.

Tell me more about the decision to finally reveal your face.

When he was still there, Hank Stuever, the features editor, said, "Just do me a favor. When you leave, let us take a good picture of you." I just wanted to go stage left, sort of. I felt a bit shy about that.

But now I feel great about it. On my way to dinner last night, I had two people on the sidewalk say, "Hey, you're the food guy!" So it was kind of nice. I don't know how long that's going to last, but it was really sweet. I was just tickled. It feels super liberating.

What have been your favorite disguises over the years?

I wore a modified fat suit to Citronelle because I knew that Michel Richard and his staff there knew me. I went with another couple who had never been there before, and I used their names on the reservation. I had a new and pretty good wig and darker glasses. And I told everyone what to order ahead of time, and someone actually ordered for me because I'd done some radio and stuff like that. So that was kind of fun to get in and out and not be recognized.

One of my worst: when Roberto Donna had the restaurant-within-a-restaurant at Galileo. He had this long tasting menu, and I remember the third course was this Italian wedding soup. Steamy, steamy, steamy. My [fake] mustache started peeling. A friend told me, "You have to go to the bathroom—your face is falling off."

But the hardest one was probably when I went to Range. I had these false teeth. They weren't really attractive. They weren't like Halloween bad, but they were bad. The problem was that I couldn't actually eat with them. So when I tried the food, I'd have to put my fake teeth in my napkin and then quickly chew something and put the teeth back in. I think I went home hungry.

Now that you've given up anonymity, can you reveal some of your fake names? How did you decide on them?

I think I had a Martin Hepburn. Lee Smith. Nick Taylor. For a while—I just thought this was hilarious—I had "I. Don Cook." Like "I Don't Cook," if you say it really fast. I used friends' names for all the times that I went to the Inn at Little Washington or some of these bigger restaurants where you write about them once a year. And they remembered those names. So when those people went back subsequently—not just the Inn but other places—they always expected I would be in tow. Friends would say, "Oh, the service is really great and everything, but I think they expected you to be there."

Do you think your successor should attempt anonymity like you did?

That is up to him or her. You know, a lot of established critics have come out over the years. I can argue the advantages and disadvantages of both. I do think there's something kind of fun about being as stealth as you can. With technology and everything, it's really hard to maintain anonymity. I always felt like I had a real advantage in that I went to most restaurants at least three times. At least over

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TOM SIETSEMA

one of those visits, somebody wouldn't recognize you. I think it's important not to make a reservation, obviously, in one's own name. I think the element of surprise is super important.

But I do kind of admire what some critics have done, like, "Hey, you know, it wouldn't be fair if we didn't publish my picture because some people know what I look like and some people don't. So here I am to the world."

After 1,200 reviews, are there any that are most memorable to you?
Well, the one I'm probably best known for is the [zero-star] Founding Farmers review. I mean, I still get that from people: "You're the guy who wrote about Founding Farmers."

I didn't just write restaurant reviews. [Here are] two stories that I'm really proud of. One is when I spent a year going across the country rating [the best food] cities. The *Post* gave me the great opportunity to spend a week in each city and really delve into them, not just parachute in. [And] I loved, loved, loved doing my story on dishwashers. That was so important to me. Dishwashing is a gateway to so many other paths in American life. You really can make it here if you work hard and you have a little bit of luck, and restaurants are a gateway to potential success in the United States. I loved getting behind the line, getting dirty and having sharp objects thrown at me and getting wet. We all wore Hefty trash bags. At the end of the night, it looks like someone vomited all over you. It's hot. The floors are sticky. It was nuts. But I loved doing that story.

You really have a sense of what diners are feeling from your weekly Q&A chat. What complaint about restaurants has come up most?
People hate noisy restaurants. And I'm not [just] talking about old people, either. I'm talking about young people. It's a universal problem. Second would be all the surcharges. I love the fact that so many restaurants now put a [20-percent] hospitality charge on. I don't mind that, because that's what I would typically pay. That's what most people should pay when they're going out. It's an expensive business. And I do think Americans have eaten way too cheaply for way too long.

Everyone wants people to make a decent living wage, but if you're going to charge us 20 percent, put it on your website, announce it at the table, circle it on the bill. Way too many of us—raising my hand here—have given people 40 percent when they meant to do 20, because someone hasn't told them.

What's the thing you'll miss the most?
It would be easy to say the expense account, but I have budgeted money, so I'm still going to eat out enough. It was great as a critic because no one turned you down [to go to] dinner. Everyone wanted to go on a restaurant review. I was always surprised. [I would] meet people and they worked at the White House, and [I'd think,] you're excited about *this* and you meet celebrities and newsmakers all the time? But there's something about being a food critic that people have a million questions about.

As a critic, you're always trying new restaurants and you don't get to be a regular anywhere. Are there places where you see yourself doing that now?
Yes. The Bombay Club. I love Indian food. Chicatana, my favorite Mexican restaurant, which just relocated. I love those guys and what they do and their work ethic. And Hitching Post. I'll still go back there. It's one of my favorites, and it really helped me all during the pandemic. And then probably Buck's Fishing & Camping. I love the bar there for sure.

What's next for you?
I'm going to create, probably, a newsletter. I do have a book in me at some point. It'll be a children's book with one recipe. I think I have a good little outline for it. I'm looking forward to that. I would be open to doing a podcast or something on TV. I'm just open to possibilities. Sometimes when you make these leaps, the world kind of opens up to you. I definitely have plans. I'm not someone who likes to sit back and chill. I want to keep this momentum going. W

Food editor Jessica Sidman is at jsidman@washingtonian.com. This interview has been edited and condensed.





PHOTOGRAPH BY STUDIO FIRMA/STOCKSY

Stepping Up to the Plate

How do you recover from a particularly dark period in your life? Invite Sally Quinn over for a dinner party.

By Sylvie McNamara

THE LAST REAL PARTY I THREW WAS IN 2019, back when I'd sometimes have odd groupings of women over to my tiny New York apartment. At that final one—after everyone was fumbling and drunk, overheated from proximity—I cracked a kitchen window so that one of my friends could smoke, and we all clustered around her to feel the air. There was such joy in bundling together like that. I made a new friend at that party. I learned a secret that was truly bizarre. Someone left her watch, and I still have it in a drawer because then the pandemic struck, I became a parent, I moved cities, and I never saw her—or hosted a party—again.



Lately, there's been talk of the decline of parties, how Americans today are gathering far less than a couple of decades ago. Loneliness is on the rise, teens aren't drinking or canoodling, nobody is going out. A post-pandemic social malaise has conspired with crippling tech addiction to atomize people and trap them in their homes. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 4.1 percent of Americans hosted or attended a social event on an average weekend in 2023—a 35-percent decline since 2004. In 2024, after years of circling the drain, Party City finally went bust.

Those latter facts were reported in the *Atlantic,* back in January, under the headline "Americans Need to Party More." "Everyone wants to attend parties, but no one wants to throw them," the writer, Ellen Cushing, reflected, citing polling that while almost all Americans enjoy birthday parties, fewer than a third planned to host. She urged readers to "create the social world we want" by throwing two parties in 2025. That seemed doable. I resolved to comply.

But instead, my marriage collapsed and my little brother died and I spent much of the year holed up in a sparsely furnished starting-over apartment alternating between sobbing and feeling catatonic. Yes, friends came over, but just one or two at a time. We'd eat dinner at my water-stained table, sitting on stiff folding chairs that I'd bought online. How could I possibly host a party? I couldn't. I was grieving and ill-equipped.

Still, the zeitgeist hounded me. "It's time to Make America Party Again" was a midsummer declaration from the Substack of former presidential candidate Andrew Yang. Two weeks prior, journalist Derek Thompson had published a long piece bemoaning the death of the party, the fact that of any period in recorded history, Americans currently spend the most time alone. But one could also glimpse a resurgence: the reissue of Martha Stewart's extravagant 1982 book, *Entertaining,* and the flurry of startups devoted to throwing parties so that young people can flirt and find friends offline. This fall, I took particular note of the chef Samin Nosrat's book tour, where she described clawing her way out of a brutal post-pandemic depression by hosting a standing weekly dinner party with friends.

Alone in my quasi-empty apartment, I envied Nosrat. I longed for warmth and levity and fun. I wanted to feel less bad, to see my friends more, for none of us to spend our nights scrolling endlessly through junk-strewn platforms or engaging in subhuman, empty-calorie banter with ChatGPT. It began to seem like throwing a party might be a gift to myself and others. And somehow, I decided that the best way forward would be to invite the most intimidating possible guest, the grande dame of Washington hosting: Sally Quinn.

THE PARTY RECESSION HAS ALSO come for Quinn. "I keep calling my friends trying to find out if there are all these fabulous parties that I'm just not invited to," she told me on the phone in September. On that call, I explained that I was rusty—that I hadn't hosted in years—but I hoped to throw a dinner party that she would attend and critique. Quinn called me "very brave," told me she would absolutely come, then added, "I always say that to be a Washington hostess, you have to have nerves of steel."

Quinn advises preparing topics: celebrity gossip, dysfunctional families, the decline of democracy. "When all else fails, talk about sex."

A journalist of illustrious professional achievements and author of the recent novel *Silent Retreat,* Quinn also has quite the party résumé. In the late '60s, she began her career as the social secretary for the Algerian ambassador, a much-sought bachelor known for his smashing embassy fetes. Then she covered parties for the Style section at the *Washington Post*. Once she coupled with the paper's longtime editor, Ben Bradlee, they became hosts of much renown. In their Georgetown mansion, Quinn has entertained senators and billionaires and movie stars and vice presidents. She's had sit-down dinners for 60 people. And at 84, she's still hosting. Last winter, she had seven parties in seven weeks.

To prepare for my dinner, I read Quinn's 1998 book, *The Party: A Guide to Adventurous Entertaining*. She writes that a party should be held "someplace that's too small," so that people are pressed together and the event seems "oversubscribed." The food should be good but not so good that it distracts from the socializing, and as long as there's "plenty of booze on hand," it can't be "a total bomb." Bad lighting, however, "can literally ruin a party." Quinn prefers soft pink halogen bulbs, because they lend faces a "postcoital flush." Also, she wants you to buy the store out of candles: "Your house should look like high mass on Christmas Eve or Barbra Streisand's bathtub in *A Star Is Born*."

As for the table, it's best if it's round or square. That way, everyone faces each other and it's easier to converse as a group. And while the tablescape should be lovely (candles, flowers, cloths), why "make cranberry wreaths until your hands bleed" when it'll look just as nice without? For maximal "sexual energy," Quinn insists that the seating must alternate genders, with romantic partners placed apart. It's dated, for sure. But as one friend put it, "We live in bisexual times, so you can have a bisexual seating chart. Putting two hot people next to each other is always going to do a lot—I don't think she's wrong."

Quinn feels strongly that the point of

a party is fun. Yes, she believes that every table should have "at least one live flower"—its height not more than nine and three-quarters of an inch—but she's not, in the end, all that fussy. To her, a good party is not about having a perfect table or the most elegant decor. It can be friends sitting on the floor eating takeout. Food can be served on fine china or paper plates. As long as people are laughing and carousing and enjoying one another's company, the rest is mostly a wash. In fact, Quinn believes perfection is bad. In advance of my party, she gave me some lovely advice: that "any mistakes you make will be a gift to your guests," because messing up relaxes people, makes the whole thing feel more human and down-to-earth, which only enhances the mood.

I felt totally capable of following Quinn's advice, until I reached page 167 of her book. There, she writes that the primary entertainment at a party is conversation, and conversation "is the responsibility of the host." Quinn advises steering dinner guests through five or six topics that "everyone might be interested in," a mix of high and low: celebrity gossip, the decline of democracy, dysfunctional families, conflict abroad. ("When all else fails," she instructs, "talk about sex.") I knew immediately that I'd encountered a problem. I do not enjoy attention. I blanch at anything resembling a "leadership role." So I blocked out that aspect of hosting and simply hoped for the best.

IT WAS A SURREAL THING TO SEE Sally Quinn in my living room on a Thursday night in October, wearing white, sitting on one of the stained, mismatched chairs I'd bought secondhand the week before. She told stories of the Nixon years and Jackie Kennedy's life in Georgetown, then chatted about celebrity facelifts while sipping seltzer from a hexagonal glass. My friends—crowded into my apartment, smashed together in chairs, on the floor, on the couch—seemed awed. We're mostly in our thirties. Quinn was an emissary from an era and stratum of Washington that we'd never encountered firsthand.

To attempt to seat 11, I'd first pushed together a table and a desk, but that was insufficiently large, so I borrowed an additional table and threw two matching cloths over the whole stitched-together mess. Then I cooked for days. A friend brought flowers and lit an aggressive number of candles. By party time, the room looked reasonably nice. There wasn't enough light, the dishes didn't match, half the chairs were desperately uncomfortable, and our legs barely fit under the table—but all of that was actually fine.

The struggle, as I feared, was social. My friends and I are quite capable one-on-one, or even in a smallish group of six or eight. But 11 felt intimidating and unwieldy. There's a barrier to talking

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Quinn is far too polite to say so, but she essentially had to host my dinner party herself. Once she began steering, the dynamic changed.

about yourself in front of that many people, a sense that to ask for everyone's attention, you'd better offer up something good. It felt safer to hang back—to let others talk—and that is, in general, what we did.

Quinn is far too polite to say so, but she essentially had to host my dinner party herself. At her own parties, she explained, she'll rap on her glass and summon the crew for "GenCon." That's "general conversation"—the thing she describes in her book where the host leads the table in discussion. I watched her do it, fish around for topics that might engage us. And once she began steering, the dynamic changed. People started to talk.

GenCon yielded intriguing results, some things about my friends I hadn't known. "Where do you think this country will be in five years?" led one friend to describe his family's experience of the Iranian revolution. Asked about spirituality, another talked about drifting from his childhood megachurch. Prompted to recall the "worst dinner party you've ever hosted or attended," a friend who was once married to a Marine told us that years ago, a bunch of officers' wives came to her house at Camp Lejeune, and one of them got too drunk. She holed up in the bathroom, and my friend assumed she was sick. But once everyone left, she realized that her guest had looted her toiletries: her makeup, her toothpaste, her deodorant, even her soap. None of it was ever returned.

After a few hours, my party broke up. I got a lot of appreciative texts. My friends liked the food, the company, the novelty, and they especially liked hanging with Quinn. "This was my first capital-W Washington, DC, dinner party," one said.

Nonetheless, I fixated on my failures—particularly, our struggle with GenCon, which I discussed with various guests. They thought that the issue might be generational, that big dinner parties are a status symbol inaccessible to many people our age, a cohort with much less wealth than generations past. We aren't used to being at a table of 11, to speaking with that many people at once. Who has a big-enough apartment for that, anyway? Who can afford to serve that much food?

But when I debriefed with Quinn, she did not seem swayed. Eleven guests is no different than five, she said, then pivoted to waxing philosophical. She appreciated my dinner party because "it just makes such a difference to be able to be together and talk and feel like we're not alone." Yes, the point of a party is fun, but the purpose is broader; Quinn believes there's civic value to assembling friends, diverting them from their difficulties, and providing a forum to collectively make sense of these confusing and frightening times. And besides, parties have a salubrious virality, in which attending one incurs obligations of reciprocity, which means that a single event might then spawn a swarm.

I did not throw a phenomenal dinner party. I threw a fine one, but that was enough. My friends had fun. We're all still discussing it. And it's inspired a few others to host. Recently, an invitation arrived in my inbox: a dinner party for raclette season, hosted by a newish friend whose home I've never seen. He was at the Quinn party and seemed to have learned from my experience. On the email thread, he sent a menu of GenCon topics—aliens, the demolition of the East Wing—just so that everyone could prepare. W

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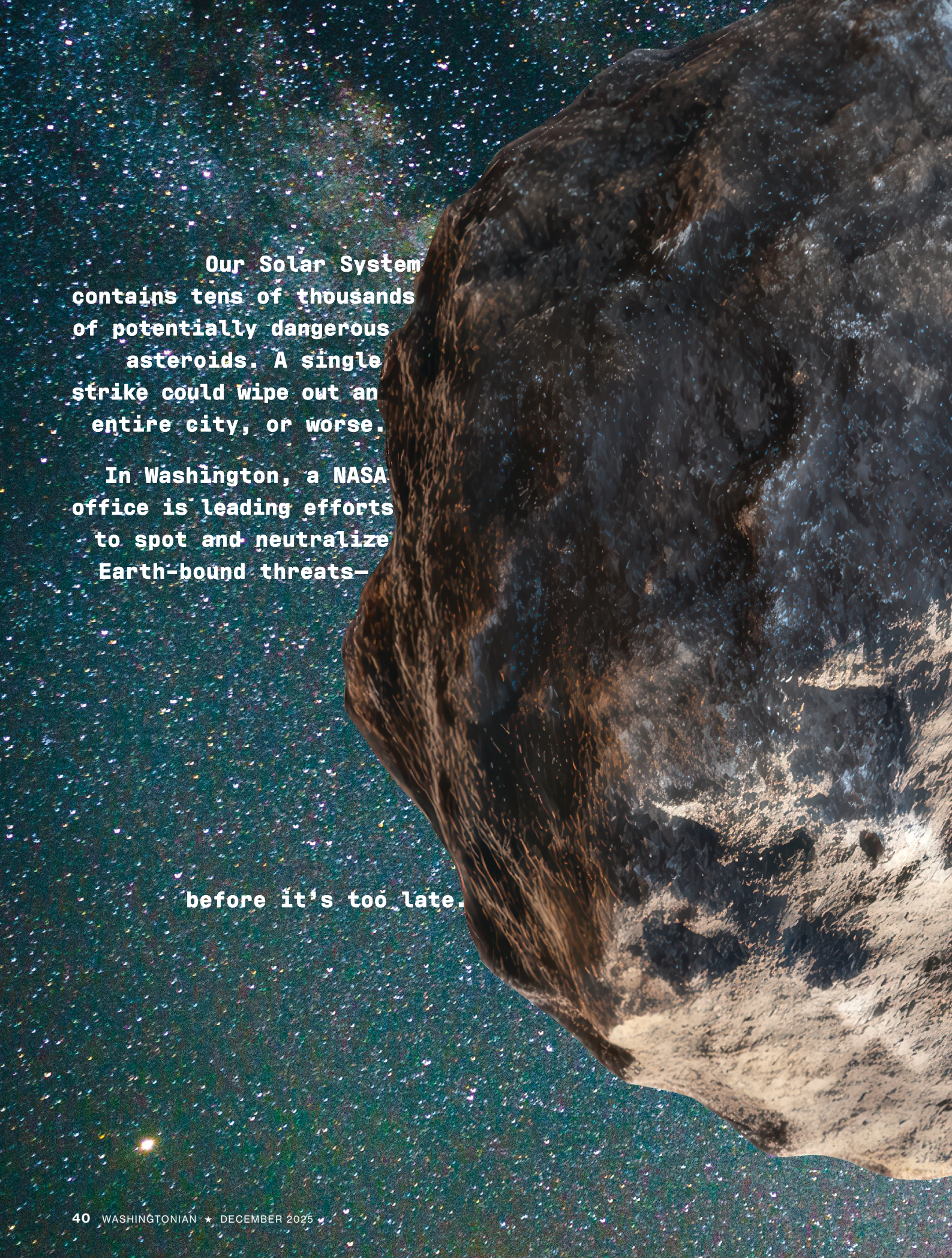


Our Solar System contains tens of thousands of potentially dangerous asteroids. A single strike could wipe out an entire city, or worse.

In Washington, a NASA office is leading efforts to spot and neutralize Earth-bound threats—

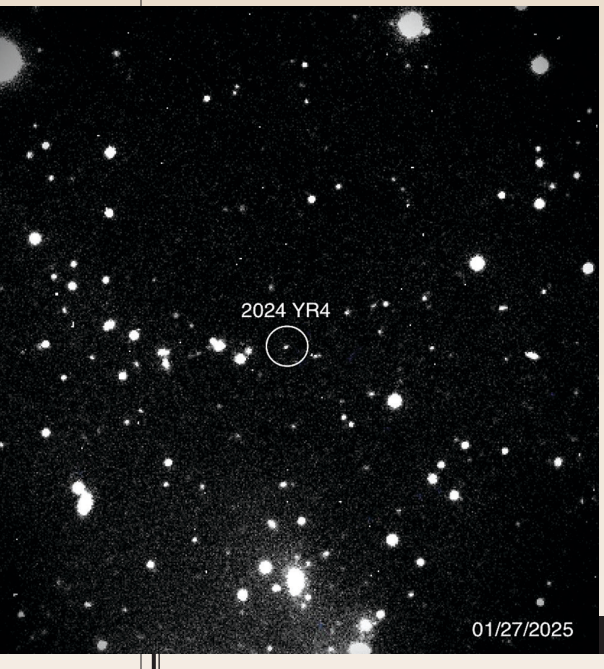
before it's too late.



STOPPING ARMAGEDDON

By Andrew Zaleski

HAD YOU GAZED into the NIGHT SKY just after Christmas in 2024,



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you might have seen any number of things.

A kaleidoscope of sparkling stars.

A plane flying over the Potomac River, readying for landing.

Maybe even some fireworks, launched by revelers impatient for New Year's Eve.

What you wouldn't have seen was the potentially killer asteroid, hurtling through outer space, headed toward Earth.

To observers manning the Asteroid Terrestrial-impact Last Alert System (ATLAS)—an initiative consisting of two telescopes in Hawaii, one in Chile, and one in South Africa—the dot first appeared on December 27 against the black background of a telescopic image. Not long after, researchers at the Catalina Sky Survey spotted the same dot in images captured by three telescopes in Arizona. The Minor Planet Center, a Massachusetts facility that serves as the world's repository for asteroid observations, confirmed that the dot was indeed an asteroid—one that hadn't been previously detected. The center also gave it a provisional name, 2024 YR4.

And for a few weeks, that was that. Astronomers are used to discovering new asteroids: On a good shift at Catalina, sunset to sunrise, researchers can tally as many as 50. Every day, our planet is hit by 100 tons of sand-size particles from the cosmos, as well as small space rocks that burn up in the atmosphere and create shooting stars. Neither are any more dangerous to human life than a newborn kitten. Meanwhile, the asteroids large enough to do damage mostly whiz by harmlessly.

YR4 was an estimated 60 meters across, or about 200 feet. In early 2025, astronomers came to a sobering conclusion: The asteroid's orbital path around the sun could intersect with Earth's—meaning it might crash into our planet—in 2032. If that happened, the impact would emit energy equivalent to 7.4 megatons of TNT, about 500 times the energy released at Hiroshima. Where exactly YR4 would land was unknown, but scientists drew up a collision corridor that included the cities of Bogotá and Mumbai.

This, of course, was a problem. In the 1998 popcorn flick *Armageddon,* the solution came via actor Bruce Willis and his take-no-guff squad of oil drillers, who flew a space shuttle to a ginormous space rock, bored into the beast, and deposited a nuclear bomb that blew it to smithereens. In real life, the job of preventing devastating asteroid strikes is overseen by NASA's Planetary Defense Coordination Office. Headquartered in DC, it's tasked with the mission to search for—and, ideally, thwart—asteroids that menace our planet. Relying on a global network of astronomers scanning the skies with land- and space-based telescopes, the

PREVIOUS SPREAD, PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY PEXELS AND RAWPIXEL; THIS PAGE, TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY NASA/MAGDALENA RIDGE 2.4M TELESCOPE/NEW MEXICO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY/RYAN; BOTTOM BY DANIEL OBERHAUS

PDCO quarterbacks efforts to spot asteroids like YR4, calculate their sizes and trajectories, determine possible collision sites, and model impacts. It's also at the forefront of figuring out practical, non-Hollywood ways to stop those asteroids before the worst can happen.

Leading the way is Planetary Defense officer Kelly Fast, who works from NASA headquarters off the National Mall. In a solar system that's home to more than a million estimated asteroids, her job—and that of the sky-watching army she supervises and collaborates with—is never done. "It's the only natural disaster we could potentially prevent," she says.

"A WAKE-UP CALL"

When I met Fast in early September, she was in a hurry, squeezing in our interview in the lobby of NASA HQ before catching a flight. While she's relatively new to her job, having become the PDCO's acting director in May 2024, space has been a lifelong fascination.

Fast grew up in Los Angeles, with a view of the Griffith Observatory out her window, and eventually majored in astrophysics at UCLA. She then earned a master's and a doctorate in astronomy at the University of Maryland. Fast wanted to study planets, but a stint at NASA's Infrared Telescope Facility in Hawaii pushed her toward asteroids. In 2014, she became manager of an agency program that tries to find objects like YR4.

For a long time, humanity didn't worry much about rocky wrecking balls hightailing it through space. The first asteroid discovery didn't happen until 1801, when Italian priest and astronomer Giuseppe Piazzi spotted Ceres from an observatory in Sicily. About a quarter of the moon's size, Ceres is so large that NASA reclassified it as a dwarf planet in 2006. A collision with Earth would be catastrophic. For more than a century, however, conventional wisdom among astronomers held that such collisions happened so infrequently that they weren't worth fretting over.

Then came geologist Eugene Shoemaker. In the 1950s, Shoemaker was an employee of the United States Geological Survey when he examined what's now known as Barringer Meteor Crater in Arizona. For decades, scientists had debated whether the crater, 550 feet deep and nearly three-quarters of a mile across, was created by a volcanic eruption or an asteroid impact. Most believed it was the former—until Shoemaker discovered coesite in the crater, a rare form of silica mineral found in quartz rock that's been suddenly pulverized with intense pressure. Coesite can't be formed by volcanic forces—only an impact or a nuclear detonation can do the trick.

Taking what he learned on Earth, Shoemaker looked to the moon, concluding that all of its craters were made by asteroid impact. (Shoemaker actually helped train the Apollo astronauts and hoped to become the first geologist to walk on the lunar surface before a medical condition disqualified him for the mission.) In the 1970s, he set up a program at Mount Palomar in California, where he and his wife, Carolyn, spent seven-day stints searching the skies for asteroids. Eventually, Shoemaker started finding them, evidence he used to argue that space rocks hit our planet more often than anyone thought. That argument was bolstered in the late 1970s, when Nobel Prize-winning physicist Luis Walter Alvarez and his geologist son, Walter, discovered a worldwide layer of iridium-rich clay.

A chemical element and the second-densest naturally occurring metal, iridium is rare on Earth—but abundant in asteroids. In 1980, the father-son duo teamed with two other researchers to publish a groundbreaking paper proposing that a mass extinction that included the dinosaurs roughly 66 million years ago was the result of an asteroid impact. A ferocious scientific debate erupted, with some geologists countering



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1 The asteroid 2024 YR4 as seen by a New Mexico observatory in January 2025. Astronomers calculated it could hit Earth in 2032.

2 At the Catalina Sky Survey in Arizona, researchers tally as many as 50 new asteroids a night.

3 In the 1950s, geologist Eugene Shoemaker discovered evidence that an asteroid strike created what's now known as Barringer Meteor Crater.

4 An astronaut on the International Space Station took this photo of a "shooting star"—an asteroid burning up as it passes through Earth's atmosphere. For more than a century after the first asteroid's discovery, astronomers believed that impacts with our planet were so infrequent they weren't worth worrying about.

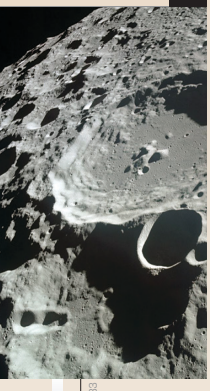
PHOTOGRAPH OF METEOR CRATER BY LARRY BLOOM; SHOOTING STAR BY EXPEDITION 28 CREW/NASA

that prolonged volcanic activity wiped out *T. rex* and friends. In the early 1990s, the identification of a massive impact crater—120 miles in diameter, approximately 66 million years old, and buried beneath Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula—gave credence to the Alvarezes's theory. Today, it's widely accepted that an asteroid strike served as a prelude to the dinosaurs' demise. So is the notion that our planet exists within a kind of cosmic shooting gallery.

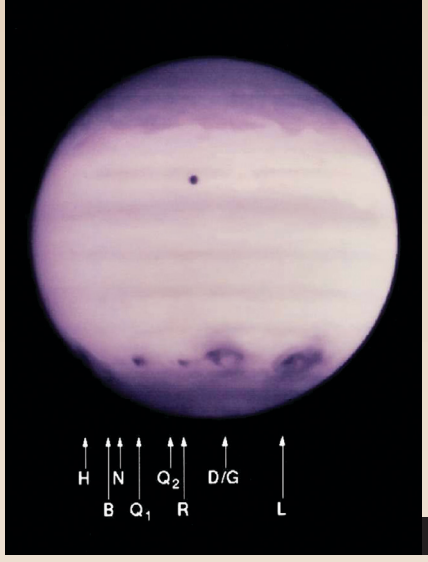
"The moon is pummeled, of course," says Paul Chodas, a senior member at the Center for Near-Earth Objects at NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab in California, where he's worked for 43 years. "And the Earth would look the same if it weren't for erosion, by the way. We'd be covered with craters." (While Earth is home to about 190 confirmed impact craters, scientists believe that wind, rain, and geologic activity have hidden and destroyed many more over the planet's 4.5 billion-year history.)

The turning point for humanity's efforts to do something about this threat occurred in 1994. That year, a comet first discovered by Shoemaker and a colleague, astronomer David Levy, smashed into Jupiter. Splintered into fragments ranging in estimated size from around 1,000 feet to 1.2 miles across, the comet produced 21 visible impacts. The largest of those created a dark "scar" on Jupiter nearly the size of the Earth's diameter. Scientists estimated the released energy to be many times greater than every nuclear warhead stockpiled by humanity combined.

Four years later, Congress directed NASA to find, track, and catalog potentially hazardous asteroids. The agency and its worldwide partners have been busy scanning the skies since, and in 2016 the PDCO was created to centralize that search. Lindley Johnson, a former Air Force officer who already had been working with NASA on asteroids for more than a decade, was put in charge. "Prior to [the comet's collision with Jupiter], natural impact on a planetary surface had never been observed before," says Johnson, who retired last May. "To actually see it in reality was definitely a wake-up call."



1 The moon's surface is covered with visible impact craters—and Earth's would be, too, if not for erosion and other geological forces.



2 The 1994 collision of a fragmented comet with Jupiter left massive, dark "scars" and released many times the combined energy of every nuclear weapon on Earth.



3 Astronomers in Baltimore watch the first images of the comet's impact from the Hubble Space Telescope—an event that prompted Congress to direct NASA to search for potentially hazardous asteroids.

SHAKING LOOSE

Asteroids, quite simply, are rocky remnants left over from our solar system's formation some 4.6 billion years ago. Most of the estimated 1.4 million asteroids orbiting the sun are suspended in a belt between Mars and Jupiter. (Ceres, the dwarf planet, resides in the belt. Rest assured, multiple planetary-defense experts attest that it's never leaving.)

Sometimes, though, asteroids do shake loose, ending up on trajectories that bring them closer to Earth. This can happen when asteroids smack into each other like billiard balls. It also can happen when the gravitational pull of Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system, tugs hard on an asteroid traveling very close by, redirecting it toward us.

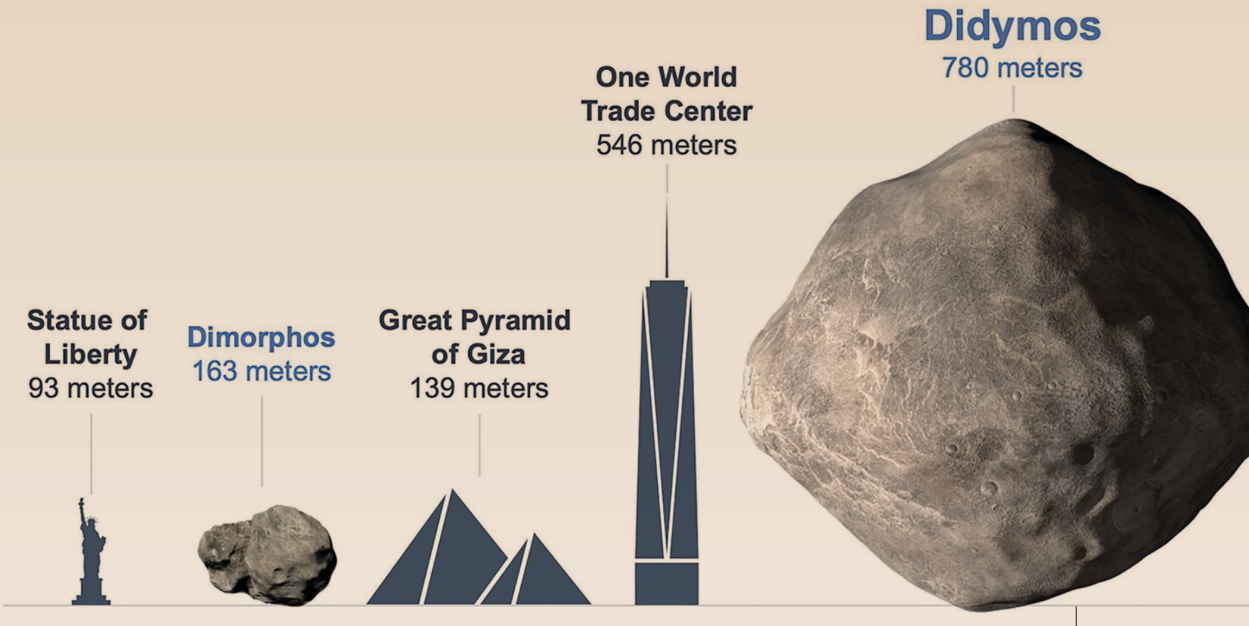
To date, NASA has identified more than 39,000 near-Earth objects (NEOs)—asteroids whose orbits could bring them within 30 million miles of our planet, close enough to possibly hit us. The good news? Fewer than a third of those are what the agency terms "potentially hazardous," meaning they also measure at least 460 feet in diameter.

Better still, none of the NEOs in the potentially hazardous group pose a significant danger of striking our planet within the next century. Overall, NASA says, the chances of an impact range from once every 20,000 years for smaller, city-destroying rocks to once every 100 million years for an asteroid big enough to trigger mass extinctions and global catastrophe. "It's not something that should keep people up at night," Fast says.

Now for the bad news: NASA estimates that 50 NEOs at least 3,280 feet wide remain undiscovered—along with 14,000 NEOs larger than 460 feet. It takes only one to have a very bad day. At the big-boy end of the spectrum, the asteroid believed to have wiped out the dinosaurs measured an estimated six miles across. Its impact, scientists speculate, triggered global wildfires, tsunamis, and earthquakes, all while throwing so much soot and debris into the atmosphere that entire ecosystems collapsed from not getting enough sunlight.

And much smaller space rocks can still hit hard. In 1908, an asteroid estimated to be 130 feet across exploded in the atmosphere above a remote part of Siberia, producing an airburst equivalent to that of the most powerful nuclear bomb ever detonated by the US, a 15-megaton blast on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1954. The resulting air waves were detected as far away as DC, and the skies of Asia and Europe were aglow for several days afterward. When Russian scientists explored the hard-to-reach site 19 years later, they found an

PHOTOGRAPH OF IMPACT CRATERS BY NATIONAL ARCHIVES; JUPITER BY HUBBLE SPACE TELESCOPE COMET TEAM; ASTRONOMERS BY NASA/STSCI



A NASA comparison of the heights of various Earth landmarks with the diameters of the asteroids Dimorphos and Didymos, both of which are large enough to be considered potentially dangerous.

area of destruction measuring 830 square miles, and an estimated 80 million trees had been felled. In 2013, a more compact asteroid—estimated to be just 66 feet in diameter, about the size of a house—exploded over Chelyabinsk, Russia. Its airburst released more than 30 times the energy of Hiroshima; 1,600 people were injured, while damage to buildings and windows was spread over 200 square miles.

Because the Chelyabinsk asteroid approached the Earth along a path with the sun to its back, astronomers didn't see it coming. In the aftermath, the United Nations established the International Asteroid Warning Network—essentially, a planetary-defense notification mechanism, coordinated by NASA, that's responsible for informing the world's governments of impending threats from above. Today, Fast serves as its coordinating officer, a natural fit with her PDCO duties. "We have to be willing to expend the resources," says Johnson, who preceded Fast in both roles, of NASA's planetary-defense efforts. "Because if we don't continue to do it, we're going to get surprised someday."

LOOKING UP

The work of avoiding surprises begins with scanning outer space for moving objects. Three major surveys—Catalina, the ATLAS program that first spotted YR4, and the Pan-STARRS telescope array on Maui—are all funded by NASA and on duty every clear night. Much of their surveillance is automated: Custom-built hardware, for instance, operates Catalina's telescopes, running its cameras and processing data. Computers then pick out asteroid candidates, looking for objects that seem to move in a straight line across a series of four images.

From there, human astronomers sort through "thousands of candidates," says Catalina director Carson Fuls. "All night long." Any observations of asteroids are passed to the Minor Planet Center (also funded by NASA). Next, Paul Chodas and others at the Center for Near-Earth Objects in California use measurements of the different positions of asteroids to figure out where they're headed, using software that Chodas himself helped code. The laws of gravity, other rules of physics, the forces of relativity, the position of the sun—all these and more go into mathematical equations that suss out the orbits of particular NEOs and how far away they are.

Next comes characterizing asteroids. Good old-fashioned radar can help determine what a space rock is made of. Depending on the signals bounced back, scientists can begin to infer whether an asteroid is mostly rocky or mostly metallic; the latter is likely to be more dangerous. Meanwhile, an asteroid's brightness provides insight into its size, perhaps the all-important metric for planetary defense. Double the size of an object and the mass goes up by a factor of eight. More mass equals more potential damage to Earth, the same way getting T-boned by a full-size SUV is worse than being hit by an electric scooter.

How bad can the damage get? Answering that question is the domain of NASA's Asteroid Threat Assessment Project, led by astrophysicist Jessie Dotson from the agency's Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley. Her team models what would happen if an asteroid hit a particular area or city on Earth. "This can be everything from cratering to tsunamis to air-blast waves to thermal damage," Dotson says.

> The impact would emit about 500 times the energy released at Hiroshima.

In the case of YR4, Dotson's team reasoned that air blasts would be the major source of damage. By mid-February, astronomers determined that the asteroid had a 3.1-percent chance of striking our planet in 2032. That might sound like a laughably low percentage—after all, poker players have better odds (4.75 percent) of being dealt two pair in any given hand—but by planetary-defense standards, this made YR4 the most dangerous asteroid ever discovered. Headlines called it a "city destroyer." Lagos, one of Africa's largest cities, with an estimated population of 16 million, was in its projected strike corridor. What, if anything, could humanity do to avert disaster?

GRAPHIC BY NASA/JHU APL



1 The PDCO's Latin motto translates to "Here to Save the Day."

2 The DART spacecraft inside its launch capsule. The audacious mission was a first-ever attempt to change an asteroid's orbit.

3 Designed and built at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel, DART was launched in 2021.

4 The DART team celebrates striking the asteroid Dimorphos—proving a concept that could protect against killer asteroids in the future.





HITTING AN APPLE

In *Armageddon,* the most belief-stretching thing isn't whatever showbiz magic is propping up Bruce Willis's fading bottle-blond hairline. Rather, it's the idea that NASA somehow could throw together a mission to intercept an enormous incoming asteroid in only 18 days.

In reality, a spacecraft for reaching the rogue rock would have to be built. A rocket to carry that craft would have to be built, too, or at least prepared. A launch date would have to be set. It takes time to do all of this—and more still to reach said asteroid in space, itself no easy task. "Mission-planning doesn't happen on a dime," Fast says. "We don't keep something on the pad ready to go, like in the movies."

Upon arrival, there's another problem to solve: knocking an asteroid out of its Earth-bound orbit. Nuclear weapons are one answer, the method of choice in *Armageddon* and the rival disaster flick *Deep Impact*. But a big blast isn't as straightforward as it seems. Not all asteroids are solid pieces of dense rock that, presumably, can be nuked into particles small enough to then burn up in our atmosphere. Some are more mountainous than smooth. Others are composed of dense metal. If a detonation leaves behind sufficiently large asteroid chunks, those pieces could slam into our satellites and the International Space Station—or, worse still, subject our planet to a cannonade of cosmic grapeshot.

In a 2003 paper that's now famous among planetary scientists, a team of space experts from Spain outlined a subtler approach. Describing a "Don Quijote" mission, they proposed sending two spacecraft—appropriately designated *Sancho* and *Hidalgo*—toward an approaching asteroid. One craft would sit back and observe, while the other would launch itself straight at the asteroid, generating an impact that would, in theory, alter its orbit. "It's just basic physics," says Fast. "Go hit something into an asteroid and it will respond."

Timing matters. Spot an Earth-bound asteroid early enough, get to it long before it arrives, and you don't need the stupendous amount of energy released by a nuclear bomb to blow it up or make it change course. You can just give it a minor nudge off its deadly orbit—and let the immensity of space work to your advantage over a period of years, almost like compound interest.

The European Space Agency studied the Quijote concept in the early 2000s but couldn't find the funding to get a project off the ground. Enter NASA, which in 2017 picked up the baton with its $325 million Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART). Space agencies had previously landed satellites on asteroids, but this mission was different: the first-ever attempt to use a kinetic impactor to strike an asteroid, redirect its momentum, and alter its orbit ever so slightly.

For a target, the agency chose a binary asteroid system made up of a 2,640-foot asteroid, Didymos, and a 525-foot moonlet circling around it, Dimorphos. While the two asteroids posed no threat to Earth, astronomers determined they would be closest to our planet in the fall of 2022. A 1,345-pound spacecraft, roughly the size of a vending machine, was designed and built at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel, then launched into space from California's Vandenberg Space Force Base in November 2021.

Ten months and 6.7 million miles later, the DART craft reached its destination—a feat *Popular Mechanics* likened to "throwing an arrow from southern France and hitting an apple on the East Coast." After deploying a small, Italian-built imaging satellite to take pictures of what happened next, it sped toward Dimorphos, ramming into the smaller asteroid at 14,000 miles an hour. Back in the APL control room, the team managing the mission watched its final moments on television. The screens went dark. The room burst into cheers.

Next, NASA waited. The apple had been struck. Did it matter? Weeks later, ground-based telescope observations allowed the agency to confirm the good news: The collision had, in fact, altered the moonlet's orbit around the larger asteroid, and by a far greater margin than what was necessary for mission success. The PDCO's Latin motto—Hic Servare Diem, which translates to "Here

PHOTOGRAPH OF DART SPACECRAFT BY NASA/JOHNS HOPKINS APL/ED WHITMAN; DART LAUNCH BY NASA/BILL INGALLS; DART TEAM BY ZUMA PRESS/NEWSCOM

to Save the Day"—was no longer wholly aspirational.

"What DART was about was demonstrating that this technology could be used in the right situation to change the trajectory of an asteroid," Johnson says. "And if you did it far enough ahead of time, you could make what was going to be an impact a complete miss."

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

It's an uncertain time for NASA. The agency has been without a permanent administrator for much of 2025. Budget cuts that the Trump administration has proposed would whittle its workforce to about 12,000 employees, roughly a third of its Apollo-era peak. Significant chunks of money supporting various research areas—studying the sun, looking into other planets, analyzing stars—are on the chopping block.

For planetary defense, however, the administration is proposing $304 million in spending, an increase of about $7.5 million. Maybe someone in the White House is a fan of disaster movies. Or maybe it's simply good politics: According to a 2023 Pew Research poll, 60 percent of Americans believe that monitoring the skies for asteroids that could hit Earth should be NASA's top priority. (By contrast, barely 12 percent believe the agency should focus on sending humans to Mars or back to the moon.)

Whatever the space program's future holds, the PDCO still has work to do. Andy Rivkin, an investigation lead on the DART mission, says that almost "everything we know about asteroids has come in the last 30 years"—and over the next few years, we'll likely know much more. Just this year, the Vera C. Rubin Observatory, a joint project of the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy, came online in north-central Chile. Equipped with a 6,000-pound, SUV-size digital camera—the largest ever built—that can move and focus on a new section of space every five seconds, the observatory will spend the next decade taking a complete survey of the Southern Hemisphere sky, detecting many new asteroids in the process. Currently, all of the world's telescopes, on the ground and in orbit, discover about 20,000 asteroids a year. During an initial test of the Rubin observatory's telescope last spring, more than 2,100 were detected in a single week. Seven of those were new NEOs.

> "It's the only natural disaster we could potentially prevent."

In the coming years, NASA plans to launch and deploy the NEO Surveyor, the first space telescope specifically built to find large numbers of potentially dangerous asteroids. Equipped with infrared detectors that can detect asteroids based on the heat they absorb from the sun—rather than the sunlight they reflect—the telescope will be able to take more accurate measurements of NEOs. It also will help astronomers spot so-called dark asteroids, currently the hardest type to find, as well as ones approaching from the direction of the sun, such as the asteroid that exploded over Chelyabinsk. "There are asteroids out there we don't know about, and we want to find them," Fast says. "But it takes time."

Speaking of taking time: About two months after asteroid hunters first identified YR4, Fast and her colleagues around the world were able to breathe a sigh of relief. Additional observations had come in. Fresh numbers had been crunched. NASA and other space agencies were able to give a confident all-clear. The asteroid, it turns out, has no chance of hitting us. We're safe, for now. W

Contributing writer Andrew Zaleski covers science, technology, and business. He profiled PETA cofounder Ingrid Newkirk in the April issue.



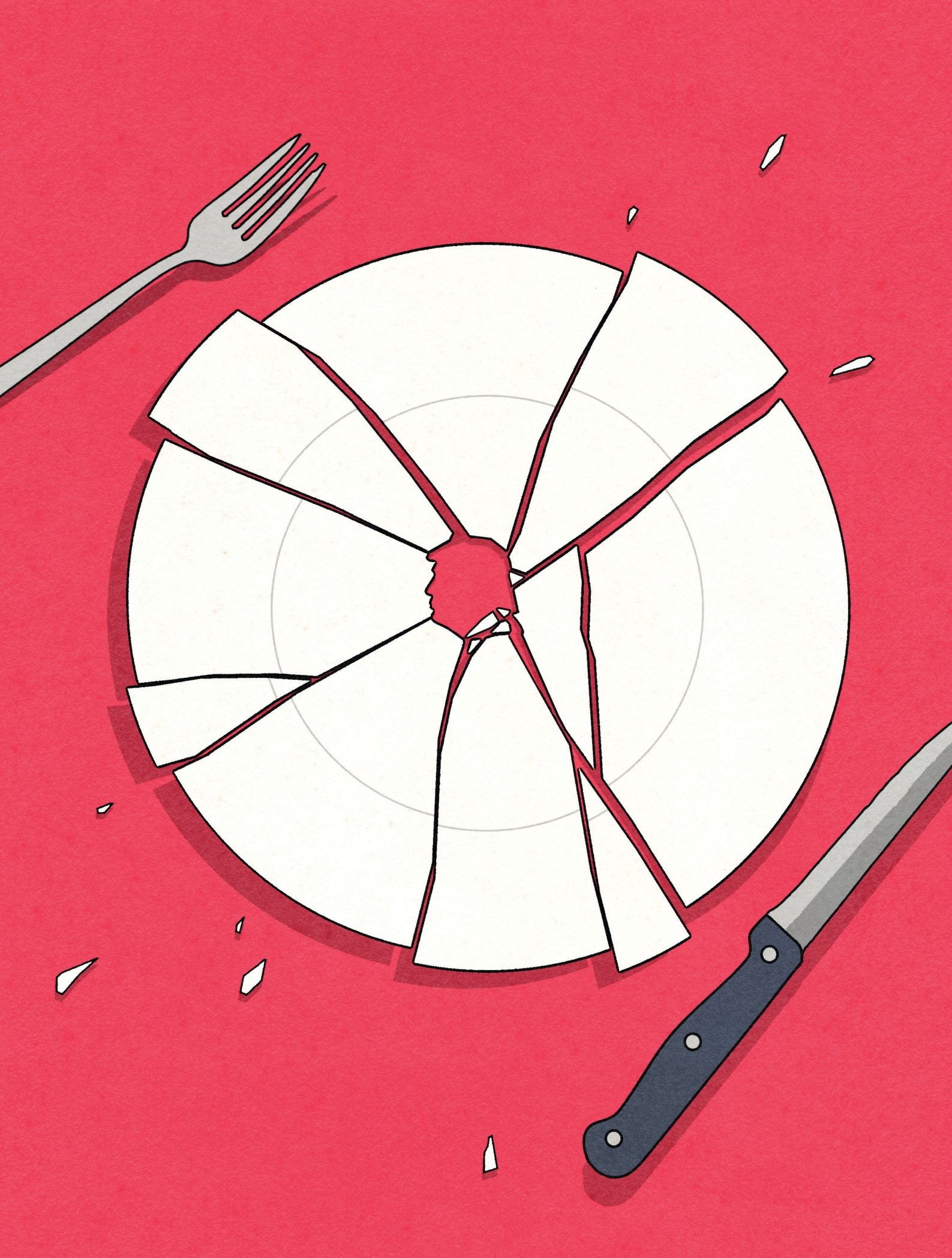
PHOTOGRAPH BY NASA/JPL-CALTECH/ASU

10M 20M 30M 40M 50M 60M 70M 80M 90M 100M 110M 120M 130M 140M 150M 160M 170M 180M 190M 200M

The DC Restaurant TRUMP SLUMP

Business is down. The vibes are tense. President Trump claims DC's dining scene is "booming" since his return to the White House—but insiders tell a different story.

BY JESSICA SIDMAN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN PAGE



Donald Trump treated the question like a dare.

"Will you visit a restaurant in DC?" a reporter asked during an Oval Office meeting with Poland's president in September.

"I might," replied Trump. "Sure."

"You haven't gone to one in either of your terms that wasn't–"

"How do you know?" Trump said. "You want me to prove you wrong? I think it's something we could consider doing. I'd love to do it. I love the White House food, but after a while, I can see going to a nice restaurant. It's safe."

At the time, the only DC restaurant Trump had ever visited during his two White House terms was the steakhouse in his former Pennsylvania Avenue hotel. And for many DC restaurant owners, that was just fine. Simply hosting the President, a deeply divisive figure, had the potential to turn any establishment into a political lightning rod–yet another headache in a migraine of a year.

"If Trump was to come, I'd be a little anxious because I don't know what that would create or cause, you know?" said Martin's Tavern owner Billy Martin shortly after Trump's remarks. His 92-year-old restaurant boasts hosting every President from Harry Truman to George W. Bush.

Another local restaurateur put it more pointedly: "Lord. Have. Mercy. On. That. Restaurant."

Less than a week later, That Restaurant turned out to be Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab. "Here I am standing out in the middle of the street," Trump told a gaggle of reporters at a closed-off intersection in front of the restaurant, surrounded by Secret Service, about a block from the White House. The President said he never would have been standing there three months ago–and certainly not a year ago, when DC was, he said, "one of the most unsafe cities in the country." But now, he declared, "it's as safe as there is in the country. The restaurants now are booming. People are going out to dinner where they didn't go out for years."

Across the street, cheers were overwhelmed by boos and expletives from a growing crowd. Inside Joe's, as Trump worked the room, a handful of activists who'd been tipped off in advance and managed to snag a reservation confronted him across a white-clothed table. "Free DC! Free Palestine! Trump is the Hitler of our time!" they yelled before being escorted out. Meanwhile, the restaurant itself was pummeled with negative online reviews–many posted before Trump and his entourage of cabinet secretaries and White House officials had even left the dining room.

From the moment he was first elected in 2016, Trump changed the DC restaurant scene. Before his arrival, Washington's unspoken code was that politicians could dine out–and otherwise go about their daily lives–more or less like anyone else, without being interrupted or harangued. In the same spirit, it used to be that restaurant operators avoided anything that might be construed as political. They were in the business of hospitality, after all, and didn't want to make either side of the capital's partisan divide feel uncomfortable or unwelcome.

But as Trump became the main character of American life during his first term, polarizing and inescapable, area dining rooms became arenas for high-profile confrontations between government officials and the public. Meanwhile, at least some restaurants embraced the resistance zeitgeist, mocking the White House with Russiagate-themed pop-ups and happy-hour discounts for presidential firings.

For the most part, however, Trump's presidency was what people talked about over dinner and drinks. It didn't dramatically affect the dining experience, or the industry behind it. This time around? Everything's different. More extreme. And not only because Trump himself has finally ventured out beyond his namesake hotel. His allies and supporters are eating out in a flashier, more emboldened way. MAGA policies and politics are hurting bottom lines, one blow after another: a sweeping immigration crackdown, mass federal layoffs, yo-yo tariffs, the deployment of National Guard troops, and a government shutdown. Today, fear and anxiety have gripped the scene. The vibes are tense. And hardly anyone wants to talk about it publicly, for fear of politically motivated retribution or public backlash.

"We're in a place now where it's dangerous and violent. The Latino community is getting scooped off of the f--ing streets heading to work," says one bar owner who, like many others in this story, requested anonymity in order to speak freely without becoming a target. "Donald Trump ran on retribution. And, boy, is he giving it to DC."

★ ★ ★

"I DON'T GIVE A F--- WHO KNOWS I'M A MAGA"

THE TRUMP INTERNATIONAL HOTEL on Pennsylvania Avenue was the MAGA mothership when Trump first took the wheel of the country, a safe space where Trumpworld's band of outsiders could rub shoulders and make deals over $29 old-fashioneds. Notably, it was one of the only places in deep-blue DC where the President could guarantee himself a standing ovation.

Otherwise, the Trump resistance was fired up and ready to pounce–anyplace, anytime. When White House officials ventured out, they risked headline-grabbing clashes. Sarah Huckabee Sanders was famously turned away from the Red Hen in Lexington, Virginia. Protesters chanted "Shame!" at then-Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen at the Mexican restaurant MXDC a day

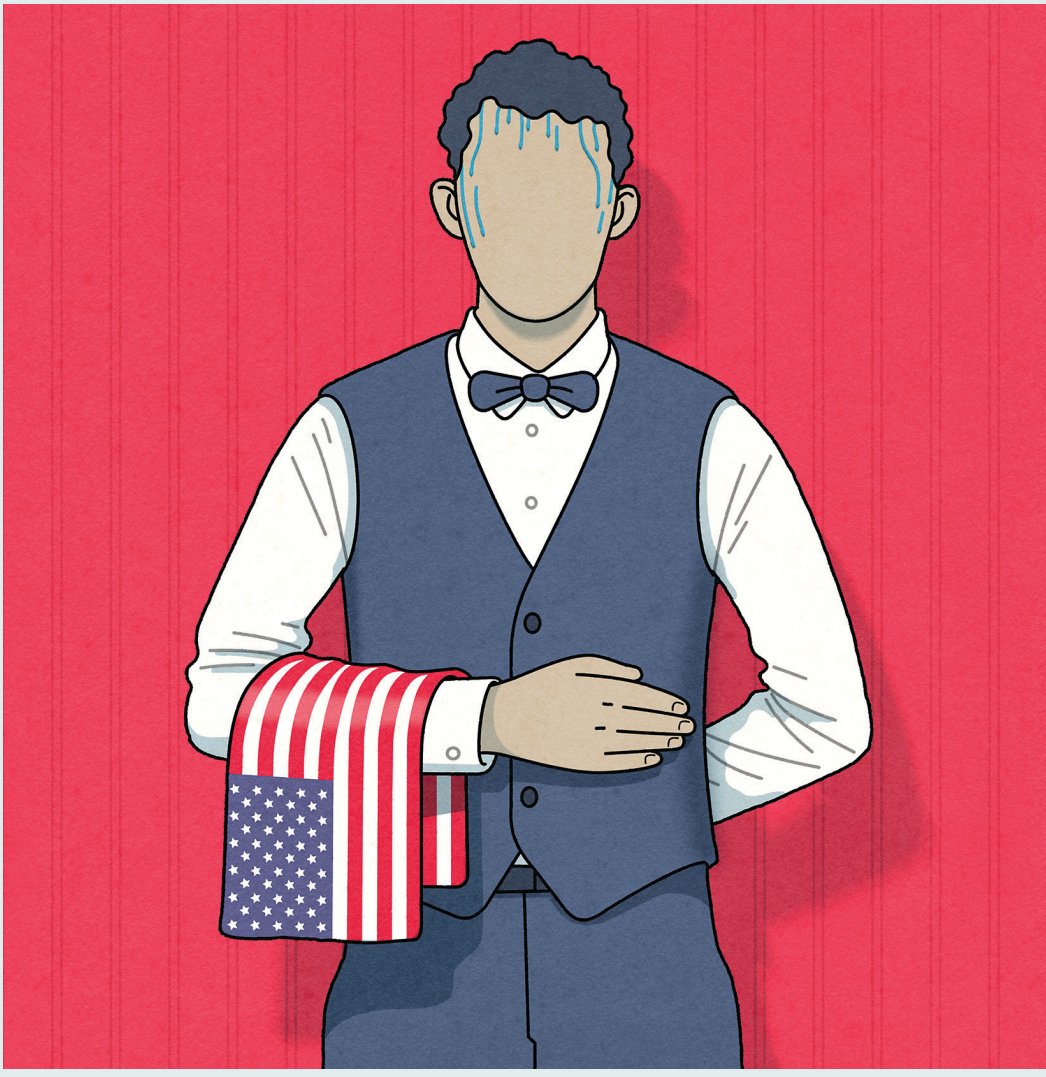
after she defended family separations at the southern border. And a mom with her toddler urged former EPA chief Scott Pruitt to resign when she encountered him having lunch at Teaism. (He actually did three days later.)

Leading up to Trump's second term, some local service staff hinted at subtler forms of resistance. "This person theoretically has the power to take away your rights, but I have the power to make you wait 20 minutes to get your entrée," a bartender named Nancy told me last December.

Katie Miller—the former DOGE spokesperson and the wife of senior White House adviser Stephen Miller—saw that quote and responded on X: "This is the best part of DC - knowing you have the power to really upset the snowflakes just by showing up to have a meal. See you soon."

Fresh off a decisive electoral victory and in firm control of the Republican party—with a leader who'd been "saved by God" in a failed assassination attempt—the Trump squad arrived in town full of swagger. Butterworth's, the Capitol Hill restaurant that counts right-wing commentator Raheem Kassam as an investor, has taken the mantle the Trump hotel once held as the de facto MAGA dining HQ, albeit with a far smaller footprint. Other administration bigwigs have congregated within a flourishing scene of private clubs, including the new Executive Branch in Georgetown, cofounded by Donald Trump Jr.

Beyond those hot spots, Trump officials and MAGA diehards have been making their way around town in a notably nonchalant way. Maybe it's resistance burnout, maybe it's fear, but—aside from Trump's own excursion to Joe's—public clashes in restaurants have been largely absent. JD and Usha Vance entertained family and friends at Rasika West End. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has been spotted at the trendy new Occidental. FBI director Kash Patel was seen at Oyamel by José Andrés, a vocal Trump critic. And Health and Human Services Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr., probably the most visible of the bunch, has eaten his way across Osteria Mozza, Le Diplomate, Martin's Tavern, and Cucina Morini. (Okay, at that last one, some patrons reportedly chanted, "Poop!")

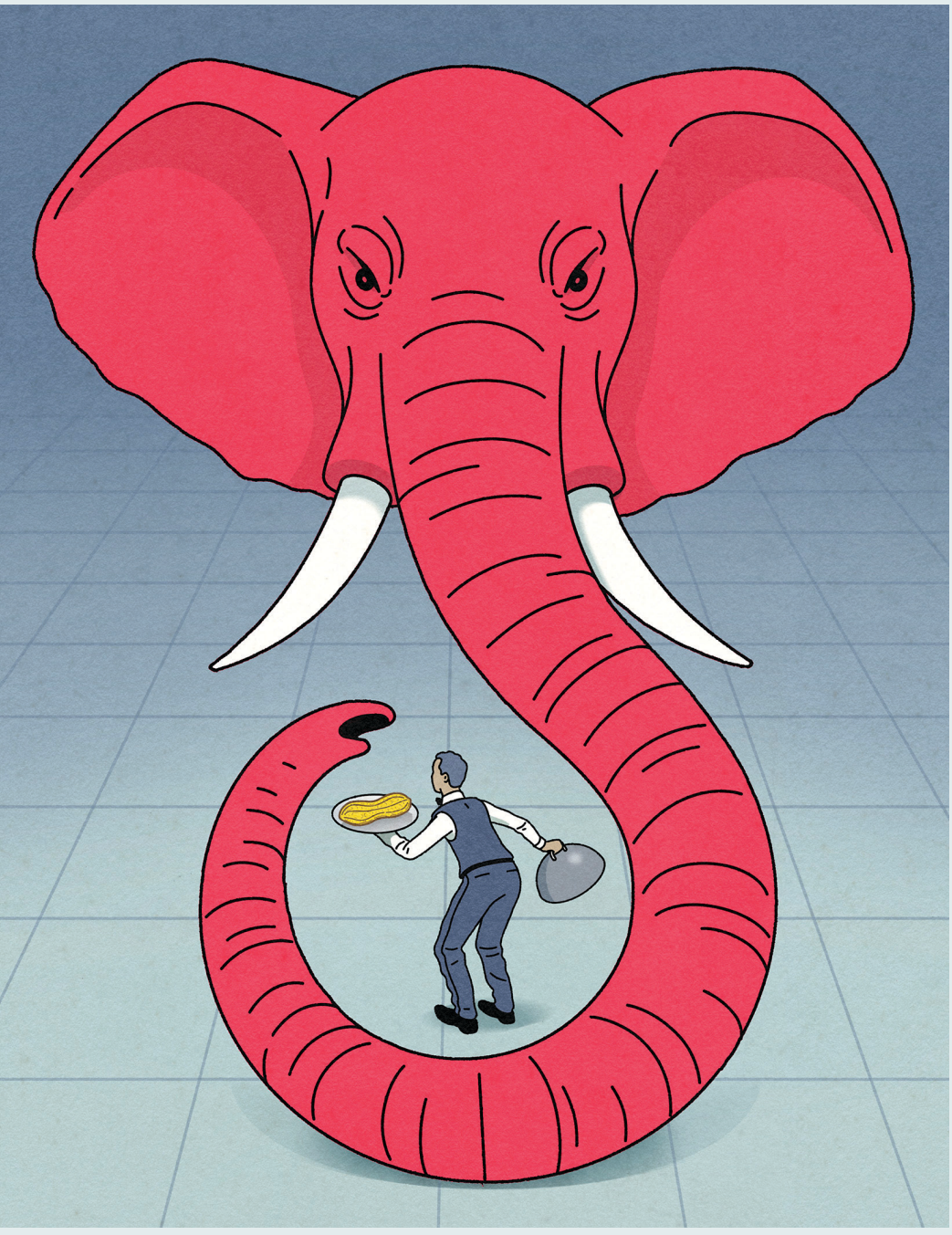


"If Trump was to come, I'd be a little anxious because I don't know what that would cause, you know?"

"They're definitely more out and about on the town, is the sense that I get from talking to colleagues," says the manager of a DC fine-dining restaurant. He's separately spotted Patel and FBI deputy director Dan Bongino, the latter sporting a form-fitting designer T-shirt and jeans in the upscale dining room. "That casualness is, I think, very distinctive. We haven't really seen that before in any administration people," the manager says.

"There seems to be an attitude of 'I don't give a f— who knows I'm a MAGA, and I'm going to just go out and spend money,' " says a different manager of a restaurant group. "And there's almost a brashness to it. I think before, people were much more discreet about it. [Now] they spend money. They come and they'll order bottles of Burgundy at lunch and drink martinis, and in some ways it's good for business."

That manager isn't the only one seeing Republican money flowing freely. "They spend more money now 'cause they don't care," says the owner of a downtown restaurant. "There are a lot of government restrictions on how you can spend money. Lobbyists, foreign lobbyists—there are rules," he says, referring to federal ethics and disclosure regulations. "There don't seem to be as many rules right now. Or maybe they're being interpreted differently or not enforced. I don't



know. There's more business. There's definitely more fundraising."

Last year, one upscale DC restaurant had a fundraising buyout for some high-profile House Republicans. The owner, a Democrat, says some staff expressed that they were uncomfortable when they discovered who they were hosting, and he had conversations with his team about remaining hospitable no matter who they were serving. More recently, a Trump cabinet secretary dined at one of his restaurants. The mood now: "We really try not to talk about politics in this space if we can avoid it. It's just too negative and polarizing."

Meanwhile, the fine-dining manager says diners are trying to chat politics more often and ask their servers if they're Trump supporters—something staff know how to deflect with polite quips about not talking politics at the dinner table. "I would say every server has had to do that at least once—some of them multiple times over the past year," he says. "It's much higher with these Trump years than I've experienced in any other administration."

The fine-dining manager says the people they're able to identify as Trump supporters "tend to flash money a little bit more." Still, a table throwing down for a pricey bottle of wine doesn't hit like it used to—because while the MAGA crowd may be living it up, business on the whole is down.

"The excitement of, like, 'Oh, man, that guy bought a $1,000 bottle of wine, that's so great' is much less prevalent," he says. "It's like, 'Oh, okay. I only have three tables tonight, so I'm glad he's here or she's here, but it would be nice if I had five tables."

★ ★ ★

"A STAIRCASE GOING DOWN"

THE KEEN BOOTS WERE THE FIRST sign. Julia—not her real name—heard Immigration and Customs Enforcement was in the area, and now a small group was suspiciously hanging outside her suburban restaurant. "We recognized them by the shoes," she says. "They have these very particular boots."

Julia says she watched the group cross the street and open the covered trunk of an unmarked pickup truck with tinted windows: "It was like *RoboCop*. This entire pickup became a machine with drawers and drawers of guns and vests and badges."

At her other restaurant in DC, staff had been on edge about ICE ever since Trump's federalization of local police and the immigration crackdown in August. In fact, some of her staff who are citizens at this suburban location volunteered to swap jobs with those in DC who are not. Now federal agents were in front of the suburban restaurant in the middle of a lunch rush. Before Julia could say or do anything, her staff had already noticed them.

"In a minute and ten seconds—because I saw the cameras later—11 of our staff members left. They took off their uniforms. They left kitchens running. They left fires on. They ran," she says.

And then . . . nothing happened. The agents left. It turned out the restaurant was a meeting point before

the agents set up a checkpoint elsewhere. They've continued to come back for lunch at least once a week. Two of Julia's employees have quit out of fear. Anxiety, she says, is pervasive—even among workers who are in the country legally.

This kind of panic has gripped area restaurants like never before. One chef, a Mexican immigrant with a work permit, says that even though he had legal status, he started taking Ubers to work instead of driving his car, because he'd heard stories about people being tracked and followed by ICE. Seven people in his restaurant group have been detained, and two more have self-deported. Now the chef rarely goes anywhere beyond work and home. "It's basically like the pandemic," he says. "We can't feel free to walk around the street, because we never know." Meanwhile, Ghostburger owner Josh Phillips says takeout orders plummeted 60 percent after ICE officers began picking delivery drivers up off the streets, and didn't start rebounding until a month later.

The immigration crackdown is just one of many Trump-related business challenges. This year's DOGE cuts to the federal workforce, the fine-dining manager says, were the first "kick in the shins."

"The lifeblood of lunch and a lot of private events is politics, and now they're not happening," he says. "Now it's 'Let's throw your dining base into chaos.' "

Cork Wine Bar owner Diane Gross says many of her neighbors are federal workers, and she's seen firsthand how people spend less. "If you're worried about your next paycheck or if you're going to lose your job, you may still be going out," she says. "You're definitely not splurging on a glass of Champagne." Even while some federal workers who have lost their jobs have gotten them back amid legal challenges, she adds, "it was this up-and-down that I think businesses hate."

Adding more turbulence? Tariffs. Gross says Trump's initial threat of a 200-percent tariff on European wine would have been a "death knell." But even the new 15 percent has been an obstacle, especially with so many watching their wallets. Gross decided to nix one of her customers' favorite wines, an Italian red called Susumaniello, from the menu when the per-glass price rose above $20. Meanwhile, Cork's signature dish, avocado toast, uses Mexican avocados and a fancy French olive oil. Both ingredients are more expensive thanks to tariffs. In response, the restaurant has switched to less expensive bread—one of the many compromises happening on menus across the city.

"Business has just dried up, and it's not just us. It is widespread—even some of the hot new businesses."

And it's not just the cost of food and wine: Cork is opening a new wine bar in Cleveland Park, and tariffs have driven up the price of lumber, flooring, and other construction materials. Gross can't even get the temperature-controlled wine refrigerator she wanted. "They're not bringing it in, because with the tariffs it's so expensive," she says.

If high prices aren't enough to turn off customers, there's also Trump's deployment of National Guard troops. Restaurant reservations dropped 7 percent from one week to the next as uniformed soldiers began appearing around Union Station, at Metro entrances, and elsewhere, according to OpenTable. International tourism was already projected to be down 5 percent this year, and Destination DC, the city's tourism-marketing organization, warned that the administration's negative rhetoric about Washington during the law-enforcement surge could be further damaging.

"It felt like the Covid times," says restaurateur Alan Popovsky, who saw sales at his downtown restaurant Lincoln decline 30 percent in August compared with the previous year. "We had to not only cut staff, we also had to counsel staff because a lot of them were scared because of the ICE component."

All the while, Trump was calling DC a "boom town." According to the fine-dining manager, that notion was "universally laughed at by every staff member. You've got to be kidding me. I've never seen this ghost town on Thursday night, on Friday night, with gorgeous weather." The manager adds that even wealthier customers—the kind who still have plenty of disposable income when times are tough—weren't dining out: "People from McLean and others who are financially well-off individuals who tend to support higher-end restaurants, it was like, 'Hmmm, we'll just ask our chef to cook dinner. We don't need to go into the city.' "

Next came the government shutdown. September and October are usually reliably busy months for restaurants. Not this year. Henceforth, a new brewery, wine bar, and restaurant on H Street, Northeast, saw business decline 40 percent between September and October, with a sudden drop at the start of the shutdown. In response, the restaurant cut back its hours and stopped serving lunch except on Sunday. It closed off sections on slower weekdays. Staff saw their paychecks shrink, with fewer shifts.

"Business has just dried up, and from my conversations with other business owners on the street, it's not just us," co-owner Mike Spinello said on day 23 of the shutdown. "It is widespread—even some of the hot new businesses."

Reopening the government won't necessarily mean a return to normal. More shutdowns in the near future would not be surprising, and the atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty permeating the region since Trump's return seems unlikely to dissipate. "Imagine a staircase going down," says the fine-dining manager. "We have seen just continual, gradual little steps down as each one of these new things happen. We haven't ever seen a recovery, because then we just walk right into the next situation. And then we have a few months and we get into the next situation."

★ ★ ★

"THE THREAT HAS NEVER FELT AS TANGIBLE"

THROUGHOUT THE UPS AND downs of Trump's first term, you could always count on DC restaurants and bars to make light of the latest

CONTINUED ON **PAGE 143**



Happier Holidays

Stroll through light displays, go ice-skating, snack on gingerbread and latkes, or turn up the volume on festive songs.

Whatever this time of year looks like for you, here's how to make the most of it—whether you're embracing traditions, starting new ones, or even letting go of expectations.



This section was written by Daniella Byck, Kate Corliss, James Jarvis, Dara T. Mathis, Sylvie McNamara, Amy Moeller, Sam Nicholson, Rebecca Norris, Emma Sullivan, Briana Thomas, and Madeline Weinfield

HOLIDAY PRO

THE DECORATOR

Nadine Araji

NADINE ARAJI, THE DESIGNER BEHIND THE BELLE Noel, a holiday decor company, has been decking the halls of businesses and homes around Washington for 16 years. Here, she shares her tips and trends for the season.

Classic Decor Is In

Araji refers to the aesthetic as "Capitol Hill townhouse," a shift away from busy designs and baubles, toward simple greenery with red bows. "You find that residences are going back to a traditional, Old World look."

Subtle Can Still Stand Out

"If you just want to have one beautiful arrangement on your table, then make the colors and the detail the statement," she says. Araji is reaching for ivory flowers dotted with pearls, stems with crystal butterflies, and pieces in shades of champagne and gold for an upscale feel.

When in Doubt, Get a Garland

Lush foliage on a door or mantle is an easy way to spruce up your home. Araji recommends faux greenery for easier maintenance, especially now that there are options that look and feel like the real thing. However, simplicity can be deceptive: Last year, Araji draped a McLean residence with a garland that cost $5,000.



Nadine Araji got her start decorating Christmas trees.

HOME RUN









HERE'S A LOOK AT WHAT GOES INTO THE DISPLAY

36 color-changing spotlights

One giant skeleton named Tina, a year-round fixture

Around **20** Santas of all sizes

More than **100,000** LED light bulbs

6 inflatable characters from the TV show ***Bluey*** *(no relation to the holiday, but Callaway's three-year-old is a fan)*

FOURTEEN reindeer, including a talking animal in the North Pole Stables and a 20-foot-tall caribou

100 gallons of fluid to make "juice" for the snow machine

MIRACLE ON STANHOPE PLACE

What happens when you move to a street where over-the-top decor is the norm?

"DO YOU LIKE CHRISTMAS?" IT'S AN ODD QUESTION FROM A LANDLORD any time of year, but particularly in May, when visions of sugarplums feel distant. But for someone moving onto Stanhope Place in Fairfax, it's pertinent: The street is the seasonal star of the Middleridge neighborhood, renowned for over-the-top displays that would make Clark Griswold proud. There are synchronized light shows, giant blow-up characters, even a 12-foot skeleton in an ugly Christmas sweater. And if you're trying to avoid all things holiday? You'll have to invest in good curtains for the last two months of the year.

My landlord's question gave me an inkling of what I could expect when I moved onto the street three years ago, but it wasn't until that November that I realized how serious it was. Thanksgiving hadn't even arrived and colorful lights began to pop up on rooflines, fences, and trees. By November 27, the street was dressed up like a Hallmark Channel "Countdown to Christmas" spectacle, with thousands of bulbs zigzagging across the treetops. Nearly every house on the block had already joined in on the tradition.

By November 27, the street was dressed up like a Hallmark Channel "Countdown to Christmas" spectacle.

At that point, I had decked the halls inside my home with three Christmas trees, countless garlands, and a collection of vintage Christopher Radko Shiny Brite ornaments. However, having just moved from an apartment that prohibited outdoor decorations, I was at a loss for the exterior. Trips to HomeGoods, Homesense, Target, and Michaels helped me catch up by November 29—a delayed arrival by Stanhope standards. Inspired by a love for all things retro, nostalgic, and rainbow, I'd given my lawn the multicolor treatment with twinkle lights woven through the bushes and around the light post. I even had life-size candy canes and peppermint-swirl bonbons staked into the ground. But I soon realized that wasn't enough: My neighbors were somehow adding even more lights to their displays. One day, the block became illuminated by twinkle lights galore. The next, I found myself falling asleep to the hum of Christmas music that accompanied one home's sidewalk-to-chimney display.

In an effort to meet the moment, I grabbed a string of icicle lights to hang on the gutter, along with a step stool and an extendable Swiffer pole. At the time, I was a single 30-year-old woman with no prior experience hanging lights, but I had high hopes that my method would work. As I struggled through the task—and before I had a chance to topple myself into the bushes—my neighbor Melody appeared with a full-size ladder. She's one of the premier Christmas decorators on the street, and she spent the next half hour chatting and steadying the ladder while I strung the lights.

That's the beauty of living on a Christmas-obsessed street. The neighborhood has held a lighting contest for more than two decades, but instead of devolving into competitive high jinks, it's an opportunity to come together and create a special destination for all who stop by. It's the first place I've ever lived where neighbors genuinely lend a hand, and that was certainly clear during the holidays.

As I prepare to move to Colorado, I intend to take that lesson—along with the ornaments, wreaths, lights, and hanging hacks I've acquired over the last three years—to my new home out west. Our neighbors there are kind, but when we signed the lease this time around, there wasn't a single mention of the holidays. Maybe that means it's our turn to take the lead on ramping up the cheer.

—REBECCA NORRIS

Transforming this Maryland residence into Jeff's Christmas Light Show Spectacular is a holiday feat. Just look at the stats.

THEY COME FROM UNDERNEATH the porch, down from the attic, and out of a shed built to keep them locked away 11 months of the year: giant inflatable snowmen and Santas, laser projectors, a fleet of reindeer, and lights—so many lights. It's all part of Jeff's Christmas Light Show Spectacular *(206 S. Camp Meade Rd., Linthicum Heights)*, the seasonal masterpiece of Maryland resident Jeff Callaway.

In addition to a 15-minute light show, the walk-through display features a mailbox for letters to Mrs. Claus, a Nativity scene, a small Christmas market with four local artisans, and visits from Santa and the Grinch, depending on the weekend. It's become a destination for revelers: According to Callaway, his family welcomed around 10,000 visitors in 2024. The jamboree begins November 28, and the light show will run Fridays and Saturdays from 7 to 9.

12-FOOT-TALL
replica of the house from *A Christmas Story*, complete with a leg-shaped lamp in the window

Thirteen
Christmas trees

?
electric bill
("I do not like to give out actual numbers," says Callaway. "But before the solar credit kicks in, for the month of December our bill does have a comma in it.")

PREVIOUS SPREAD, PHOTOGRAPH BY ACP/TRUNK ARCHIVE; OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM LEFT COURTESY OF NADINE ARAJI; OTHERS COURTESY OF JEFF CALLAWAY

SHINE ON

Three lightings to kick off the festivities



NOVEMBER 22

Alexandria Tree Lighting

For a charming small-town feel (and none of the National Christmas Tree gridlock), head to Market Square across from Alexandria City Hall. Santa will make an appearance, leaving behind his reindeer in favor of the King Street Trolley.



DECEMBER 14

National Menorah

The Hanukkah celebration takes place on the Ellipse with a 30-foot-tall menorah. Speakers and musical performers take the stage before the big moment when the first candle begins to glow.

BRIGHT SPOTS

From walking trails to a parade on the water, here's where to see holiday light displays



HOLIDAY BOAT PARADE
The Wharf
Fireworks accompany a shimmering fleet of more than 60 decked-out boats on the Washington Channel. Meet Santa, make ornaments, and sing carols at karaoke.
December 6



WINTER WONDERFEST
Nationals Park
The stadium transforms into a wintry playground with tubing runs, curling lanes, and a Northern Lights display. There's a train for kids and an "après-ski" speakeasy for adults.
November 28–December 30



WINTER WALK OF LIGHTS
Meadowlark Botanical Gardens
Vienna's leafy escape goes glam with a light show of butterflies, flowers, and other nature-themed sparkles. Enjoy s'mores and hot cocoa by the fire.
November 7–January 4



NOVEMBER 8–DECEMBER 27

National Harbor Light Show

The LED tree is more tech than tinsel, putting on a flashing spectacle every night set to music by the US Air Force band. Saturdays at 5:30 PM, fireworks accompany the display.

WINTER LANTERN FESTIVAL
Lerner Town Square
Take a break from bulb lights and walk through massive LED Chinese lanterns at this display in Tysons. Tickets also get you access to a fun acrobatic performance.
November 20–January 18

GARDEN OF LIGHTS
Brookside Gardens
This half-mile loop in Wheaton is like a safari of twinkling animals, from bears and wolves to the Loch Ness monster. Hot drinks are available for additional coziness.
November 21–January 4



PHOTOGRAPH OF NATIONAL MENORAH BY DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES; ICE SKATING BY SAUL LOEB/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; OTHERS COURTESY OF LOCATIONS

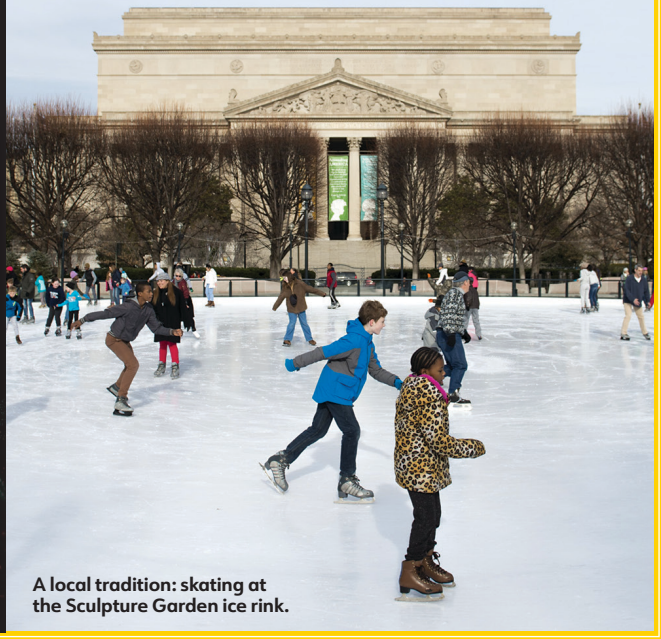
SKATE ESCAPE

For a classic winter outing, take a spin around these open-air ice rinks

SCULPTURE GARDEN
Downtown DC
A jaunt to the National Gallery of Art's Sculpture Garden rink is a quintessential Washington experience. Glide past works by artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Alexander Calder, then huddle around warm cups of cider, hot chocolate, and mulled wine. Need a tutorial before lacing up? Lessons are available for all ages.

ICE & LIGHTS
Alexandria
Located in Cameron Run Regional Park, this rink is surrounded by vibrant light displays, making it a one-stop option for holiday fun. In addition to skating, visitors can make s'mores and take photos inside the walk-through Christmas tree or with the giant wreath. Skating tickets must be purchased online in advance, and the rink is open Christmas Eve/Day and New Year's Eve/Day.

COLOR BURST ICE RINK
Columbia
A glittering snowflake canopy, garland-wrapped poles, and a tree festooned with ornaments bring a jolly ambience. You can rent skates and skate-aids, small carts that help stabilize little ones. The Columbia Figure Skating Club performs at the tree lighting on November 21.



A local tradition: skating at the Sculpture Garden ice rink.

THE GREAT TREE DEBATE

It's the most divisive issue of the season:

REAL OR FAKE TREE?

Both sides defend their stance.

TEAM REAL

WHEN MY BROTHER AND I WERE KIDS, HE DEVELOPED a mysterious allergy to balsam firs. Worse than the wheezing, in my opinion, was the remedy: an artificial Christmas tree. Gone was our family's annual visit to the tree farm, where we'd clamor around the fluffiest, greenest specimen as if it were George Clooney. Instead, we trekked to Walmart and grudgingly selected the best-looking cardboard box. After 30 minutes of trimming that evoked all the wonder of assembling an Ikea coffee table, we had a "tree." It didn't look bad. But it felt wrong–counterfeit, like a hunk of PVC posing as nature, shipped across an ocean to mock us in our own living room. I missed the tiny, quaint delights that come with inviting a piece of the forest into one's home: the soft pinch of pine needles, the sweet resin smell, the jolt of domestic accomplishment from watering the stump. I suspect something in my brother's body did, too, because two winters later, his allergy dissipated just as randomly as it had appeared. That year at the Christmas-tree farm, my dad hitched a miracle to the roof of the car.

–KATE CORLISS

TEAM FAKE

AT THE AGE OF TWO, I HAD A BRUTAL ASTHMA ATTACK caused by a live Christmas tree, and it's been fake trees for me ever since. That's for the best. I hear you have to go out in the cold to purchase a real one, and vacuuming is also my least favorite chore. My current fake tree, acquired on a dreary late-fall day in 2019 when I desperately needed some cheer, is objectively awful. It's the saddest 12-inch faux fir you ever saw; it's scraggly and obviously plastic and conspicuously bare, with built-in multicolored lights that look oddly aggressive when they strobe. But it reminds me of the tree in *A Charlie Brown Christmas,* a scrawny sapling that the gang initially hates but comes around to in the end, because the holiday season–imagine this–isn't actually about buying the nicest things. It's about sharing joy with the people you love. Wheeling out this terrible little tree has become a beloved tradition in my house. The tree is funny and charming and it now carries the memories of a half dozen Christmases past. I love it. I'm attached to it. I'm never giving it up.

–SYLVIE McNAMARA

ALL SPRUCED UP

For the past four years, the DC hotel Riggs has unveiled a unique tree worth a visit. We look back on the tradition.



2022
Jewelry designer Alexis Bittar decked the tree with swans, feathers, and quotes from famous women.

2023
Crocheted garlands and embroidery hoops adorned this design by luxury brand Lingua Franca.

2024
Bows on bows on bows, courtesy of paint company Farrow & Ball and designer Christopher John Rogers.

2025
On this tree, going up December 1, expect gold hues and bespoke ornaments from couturier David Laport.

THIS PAGE, PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF RIGGS; OPPOSITE PAGE, BY THOMAS BARWICK/GETTY IMAGES

TRUNK SHOW



Whether you're chopping your own or looking for one that's precut, these tree farms an easy drive away are a charming day trip

BUTLER'S ORCHARD
Germantown
The farm has cut-your-own Douglas and Canaan firs as well as precut trees. Bring your own saw or borrow one onsite. Entry also gives access to Holiday Harvest Days, when you can greet barnyard animals and grab a hot drink from the Farmers Porch. Santa visits November 30, December 7, and December 14.
Starting November 22

HANK'S CHRISTMAS TREES AT HARTLAND FARM
Markham, Va.
This farm offers a variety of options, from blue spruces to white pines. Precut Fraser firs are also available. Expect hot chocolate, cider, and sandwiches, plus free saws, sleds, and tie-down straps.
Starting November 28

GAVER FARM
Mount Airy, Md.
Choose from more than 60 acres of firs, spruces, and pines. Staff handle the shaking, baling, and drilling for free, so you can relax and warm up with hot cider, cocoa, and apple-cider doughnuts from the Christmas Café.
Starting November 22

SNICKERS GAP CHRISTMAS TREE FARM
Round Hill, Va.
Sitting on the slope of the Blue Ridge, this farm has mountain-grown Douglas firs and Colorado blue spruces. Once you choose your tree, staff will shake, bale, and drill it. The Snack Shack serves hot chocolate, pretzels, and cider, and you can pick up wreaths for your holiday decor.
Starting November 28

WOLFE'S PINE VALLEY FARMS
Sykesville, Md.
The family-run farm offers free shaking, baling, and help loading your tree, plus a gift shop stocked with ornaments, cider, and hot chocolate. Leashed dogs are allowed.
Starting November 15

HOLIDAY PRO

THE MALL SANTA

Mike Graham

IF YOU STOP BY TYSONS CORNER CENTER during the holiday season, you'll likely see Mike Graham posing as Santa Claus. This will be his 37th year, and he's watched kids grow up and eventually bring their own children (even grandkids) to whisper Christmas wishes. Here he reflects on being a career Kris Kringle.

Selling Santa Is More Than a Look

Let's get one thing out of the way: Yes, the beard is real. But the illusion is about more than appearance. Graham will chat about the cookies kids left for him last year, reminding them to add a glass of milk so Santa has the strength to power through the night. "I'll say, 'When I'm at your house, you're always sleeping. Why is that? I thought you were going to be up!' You put it back on them."

Sometimes the Ruse Is Up

When older kids start to catch on that Santa may not be real, Graham uses the opportunity to let them in on another holiday secret. "I say, 'You remember when you enjoyed the presents over the past years? Once you lose that magic, then it's time for you to start helping others. That's when you get the real feel of what Christmas is all about.' " He often frames it as a new role, keeping the spirit alive for younger siblings or friends.

Waiting in Line Can Be Special (Really!)

Graham finds inspiration in what he witnesses leading up to the photo. It can be a two- or three-hour wait, and with a crowd of antsy kids, there's always potential for a meltdown. But he sees people help each other, pushing strollers for busy parents and holding places in line for bathroom breaks, even covering the cost of photos if someone can't afford them. "It's just amazing that over the years, that portion of it never changes. That's what humanity is all about."



Mike Graham becomes Santa Claus, no fake beard needed.

THIS PAGE, PHOTOGRAPH BY RASSI G. BORNEO; OPPOSITE PAGE, HOLIDAY MARKET BY STORYBOX PHOTOGRAPHY; SWEATERS COURTESY OF COMPANIES

SHOP AROUND

Seasonal markets offer gifts for everyone on your list

DOWNTOWN DC HOLIDAY MARKET
Downtown DC
Two blocks of F Street, from Seventh to Ninth, transform into an outdoor shopping village with glimmering lights and more than 100 vendors. The market is a great place to find gifts such as handmade jewelry and art prints. Indulge in bites from a local food truck or restaurant while you stroll.
November 21–December 23

LUCKETTS HOLIDAY HOUSE
Leesburg
Venture through a century-old, multi-room farmhouse full of seasonal goods and jolly decor. For a holiday photo op, pose in front of seasonal murals and vignettes on the grounds of Lucketts Store, and sip drinks from Vanish Brewery by a campfire.
November 6–December 14

HEURICH CHRISTMAS MARKT
Dupont Circle
If you're looking to shop small, consider this weekend event at the Brewmaster's Castle, when history, mulled wine, and Germanic influences come together. You can browse 40 small-scale makers, visit a mini craftsmanship exhibition, and partake in German snacks.
December 4–7



Vendor stalls line the street at the Downtown DC Holiday Market.

SWEATER WEATHER

Heading to an ugly-sweater party? These three pullovers have a local twist.



Metro
For the transit geek eagerly awaiting their Metro Rewind.
$50 at *dcmetrostore.com*



Spirit
'Tis the off-season, but you can still rep DC's team.
$60 at *washingtonspiritshop.com*



Crabs
What's more Maryland than crabs as reindeer?
$40 at *drinklocalmd.com*

HOLIDAY PRO



THE RADIO HOST

Chilli Amar

FOR ALMOST A DECADE, THE TEAM AT 97.1 WASH-FM have put on ugly sweaters, onesies, and Santa suits and gathered to flip the switch each season on round-the-clock holiday music. Chilli Amar, cohost of *Toby + Chilli Mornings,* shares some of what she's learned while playing constant Christmas tunes.

The Fandom Is Strong

Holiday music typically kicks off in mid-November, but callers start asking when it'll begin around Halloween. One enthusiast even started the "97.1 WASH-FM Christmas Music Fans" group on Facebook, which now has more than 1,800 members. "They are the perfect representation of why we do this," says Amar. "That's really what this is all about, bringing people together." Members post guesses about when the music will begin and share favorite tracks, memories, and holiday photos.

No, She's Not Sick of Christmas Music

A daily stream of sleigh bells and *pa rum pum pum pum* over a month and a half could result in a dislike of, or even total disdain for, holiday music. Luckily, Amar still loves it. For one, she knows there's a short window to appreciate these songs. There's also a nostalgia factor: "I can't get enough of hearing the classics mixed in with some of the current artists that are doing some of the older songs. You kind of reminisce about the good old days when you were a kid." Amar's personal favorites include the '80s classic "Last Christmas" by Wham! and Kelly Clarkson's "Underneath the Tree," from 2013.

> "I can't get enough of hearing the classics mixed in with current artists doing some of the older songs."

The King and Queen of Christmas

The first song of the season is top-secret: The hosts don't even know what they'll be playing until it's on the air. In the past, listeners voted for the inaugural track, and the first song pinged between Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" and "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" by Andy Williams. Says Amar: "The messaging is perfect. It's the most wonderful time of the year because we're about to start playing Christmas music 24-7."



Chilli Amar and cohost Toby Knapp dress up for the holidays.

BOTTOM LEFT PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TOBY + CHILLI; *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* BY SCOTT SUCHMAN/FORD'S THEATRE; MOVIE STILLS BY EVERETT COLLECTION



MAIN STAGE

Five performances to ring in the holidays

FILM FAVES

Tim Gordon, president of the Washington Area Film Critics Association, shares his seasonal picks



MODERN CLASSIC

Love Actually

(2003)

The rom-com follows eight intertwined couples juggling romance and relationships during the holidays. Gordon says it's about "what love represents and what love means in community." Among the big-name cast are Hugh Grant, Keira Knightley, and Liam Neeson.



STEP AFRIKA!'S MAGICAL MUSICAL HOLIDAY STEP SHOW
Arena Stage
This high-energy dance showcase highlights the African American tradition of stepping. Expect spectacular flips, stomps, and choreography set to hip-hop holiday beats. The performance is interactive, so you'll be on your feet along with DJ Nutcracker.
December 5–21

A JOHN WATERS CHRISTMAS
The Birchmere
The Pope of Trash and the mastermind behind retro films such as *Hairspray* and *Cry-Baby* is back at the intimate Alexandria venue to deliver his provocative comedic monologue about all things Christmas. You'll want to leave the kids at home for this one.
December 20

THE WASHINGTON BALLET'S *NUTCRACKER*
Warner Theatre
DC's resident ballet company puts a Georgetown spin on Tchaikovsky's tale, with dancing cherry blossoms and a heroic George Washington nutcracker to save the day.
November 29–December 28

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
Ford's Theatre
Before the Grinch, Christmas's go-to grouch was Ebenezer Scrooge, the star of this tale by Charles Dickens. Ford's hosts a performance on November 23 that includes adjusted sounds and lights as well as shows on December 4 and 13 with ASL interpretation and audio description.
November 20–December 31

THE SNOWMAN AND THE SNOWDOG
Imagination Stage
Puppets and actors (including a dog) come together for a kid-friendly play about a boy and his snow creatures that come to life. The December 6 and January 3 performances feature ASL interpreters; December 14 has gentle effects, and house lights stay on.
November 19–January 4

***A Christmas Carol* returns to Ford's Theatre.**



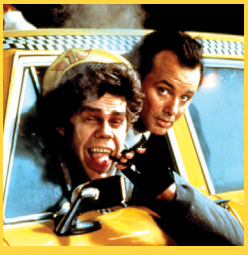
TEARJERKER
***It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)**
An angel helps a troubled businessman see the good in himself on Christmas Eve in this black-and-white classic. "Every time I watch that movie, it makes me cry. That is my Christmas jam right there."



NONTRADITIONAL OPTION
***The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996)**
Gordon describes the high-octane thriller, which takes place during the holidays, as "part *Die Hard,* part mystery, and part '90s adrenaline." It follows a suburban single mom who discovers she's actually an assassin—not your typical Christmas fodder.



NEW MUST-WATCH
***Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey* (2020)**
An embittered toymaker rediscovers his festive spirit with help from his precocious granddaughter. Gordon chose this film, which came out during the pandemic, for its sense of "humanness" and the way "it gives you some level of hope."



FOR HOLIDAY HATERS
***Scrooged* (1988)**
This remake of *A Christmas Carol* features a ruthless television executive, played by Bill Murray, who learns a lesson after firing an employee on December 23. Despite the familiar story, Gordon says, "it's done in a way that's smart. It's still funny, and it aged well."



HOLIDAY SOUNDTRACK
***How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1966)**
When a small-hearted grouch puts on a Santa costume to steal gifts, he ends up stumbling on a warm sense of community. The standout song in this animated feature? "You're a mean one, Mr. Grinch!" Gordon sings.

SWEET RELIEF

Three eateries making holiday treats easier, from DIY kits to prepared options

CUTTING (GOOD) CORNERS

Cork Wine Bar & Market

Logan Circle, Spring Valley

Gingerbread architects can get all the materials for an edible house from these markets, plus a video tutorial. Kits have the cookie walls and roof, icing, and candy for a custom-build, as well as treats to fuel the construction crew.

NO CLEANUP REQUIRED

Call Your Mother

Multiple area locations

Frying Hanukkah fare can be a messy task, but this deli chain deals with the oil. Catering includes raspberry-guava-jam-filled sufganiyot and latkes with all the fixings, from classic apple jam and sour cream to horseradish crème fraîche and smoked salmon.

GIVE YOUR OVEN A REST

Baked & Wired

Georgetown

Swaps, parties, snacks for Santa, bake sales, and sweet gifts: It's a lot of exercise for you and your oven. This bakery makes a variety of fun cookies for the season, including gingerbread, buckeyes, and peppermint-stuffed sandwiches.



THIS PAGE, PHOTOGRAPH BY WESTEND61/GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE PAGE, COURTESY OF LOCATIONS

GET LIT

DC's Hanukkah pop-up bar is frying latkes and pouring drinks in a "shotnorah"

THE FIRST YEAR THAT THE SHAW BAR IVY AND CONEY launched its Hanukkah pop-up, it was really meant to be a joke. "We were ribbing our buddies at Drink Company, who had a wildly successful Christmas pop-up bar three blocks from us," says Ivy and Coney co-owner Josh Saltzman. In that early iteration, Saltzman taught his business partner, Chris Powers, how to make his grandma's latke recipe, and they decorated just a small area. But it soon became clear they'd stumbled upon something special. "The response was overwhelming," says Saltzman. "This joke is turning into a real thing that people are going to expect of us." Nine years later, "Chai-vy and Cohen-y" remains Washington's only dedicated Hanukkah bar.

> "The response was overwhelming. This joke is turning into a real thing people are going to expect of us."



The pop-up has evolved to take over the entire bar, though the latke recipe still comes from Saltzman's grandmother. A favorite tradition is the "shotnorah," a 16-foot-wide menorah with shot glasses affixed to the top. Keeping with the seasonal spirit of community, eight people can simultaneously take a shot of Manischewitz (proceeds go to Bread for the City) or Fireball (it is a candleholder, after all). Following a few years of wear and tear—"It's succumbed to the limits of drunk twentysomethings manhandling it"—the bar is unveiling a new golden candelabrum this year.

Like the miracle of Hanukkah, when a single evening's worth of oil stretched into eight nights, Chai-vy and Cohen-y now runs beyond its original eight days to span the month of December. The bar lights candles and hands out small gifts throughout the Festival of Lights. But in some ways, Christmas Day is actually the main event. Saltzman calls it "Chinese-food-and-movie day," and the bar puts out a takeout spread, playing classic holiday films such as *Die Hard*. It's become a beloved tradition and yuletide destination for many, whether they don't celebrate Christmas or they simply want to gather with others. Sometimes patrons will bring their own treats to share. Former strangers become a part of each other's holiday traditions, even if their only interaction is once a year in the bar.

Though it's become a staple of the holiday season, the bar still maintains its lighthearted origins. That's the point, says Saltzman, especially this year: "We all need a little silliness in our life and a little bit of community to remind ourselves that it's not all shit."

TEA TIME

Three special holiday teas



Fairmont Washington, D.C.

West End

The hotel's beloved Nutcracker Afternoon Tea returns to the whimsically decorated Loggia Lounge. With both savory and "Land of the Sweets"–themed treats, sparkling cider for little ones, and Domain Chandon for adults, it's an annual ritual that never loses its magic, no matter your age.

$110; $65 up to age 12.

December 6–30



Willard InterContinental

Penn Quarter

A harpist provides a merry background for tea in the historic Peacock Alley. The hotel dons its holiday best for the occasion, including a towering tree and a gingerbread display.

$105 ($120 with Champagne); $65 up to age 12.

December 4–28



Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

Forest Hills

Marjorie Merriweather Post's former home is atmospheric year-round but especially during this season. The cafe serves tea with assorted petits fours and sandwiches. (A minimum of four people is required.) Leave time to stroll the magnificent grounds.

$50 a person.

December 4–January 4

VIBE CHECK

A therapist weighs in on the pressure to feel merry this season

"IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR" WILL SOON hit the airwaves, but for many people, the holidays are more a time of stress and anxiety.

"We're asked to process not just the immediate demands of the holidays but also the cumulative weight of everything we've experienced over the past 12 months" says Capitol Hill therapist Monica Band. "For those who've faced loss, disappointment, or struggle throughout the year, this concentrated period of reflection can feel heavy."

That's true of any year, but it's been a particularly stressful time for Washingtonians affected by layoffs, a federal takeover of DC, and the government shutdown–a noxious combination that can make a season that's rife with presents (more to spend) and parties (more questions to answer) into a very taxing time.

Band recommends being mindful of how we can get tangled up in the pressure of showing care through gifts. Instead, she suggests using that tension as an opportunity to "insert some gratitude and grounding back to people and things that matter outside of work." Gratitude doesn't need to be an exercise in forced or toxic positivity. Instead, it can be about appreciating small things such as a cup of coffee or a walk with a friend.

> **"Rather than trying to replicate some idealized version of the holidays, we can focus on what's genuinely meaningful and sustainable."**

If the holidays are going to look different this year, Band says, take a moment to be honest with family–kids are very perceptive, and unexplained changes can make them feel at fault. The holidays are often a period of "anticipatory anxiety," and Band encourages people to reframe their ideas of what celebrations should entail: "Rather than trying to replicate some idealized version of the holidays, we can focus on what's genuinely meaningful and sustainable."

Winter in general has a gloomy reputation, especially once the holiday hangover hits. But the cold season also offers inspiration. "If we huddle close to people for warmth and community, it may soften the edges we feel throughout the year," says Band. "I think we need that so badly here."

WINTER BREAK

Maybe you want to get out of the house. Or perhaps December 25 is simply another day on the calendar. Here are five great ways to spend Christmas Day.



Go Tubing or Skiing

Nearby ski and tubing destinations tend to be quieter on Christmas Day, meaning less time waiting for lifts and more runs. Whitetail and Liberty Mountain resorts in Pennsylvania are both less than two hours away from DC, ideal for a day trip.

Bundle Up for a Peaceful Walk

While many National Park Service areas are closed for the day, Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve in Alexandria and Theodore Roosevelt Island in DC are open for adventurers. Peaceful trails meander by the water, and both locations are great for birdwatching.



PHOTOGRAPH OF SANTA WITH KIDS COURTESY OF ANN MOELLER; DYKE MARSH BY NPS/CLAIRE HASSLER; ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE BY NICK HARRISON; OTHERS COURTESY OF LOCATIONS

THE JOY OF DOING LESS

Because there's nothing magical about burnout

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, CHRISTMAS IN OUR FAMILY WAS a huge deal. Before hitting holiday sales (with the precision that Black Friday in the '90s required), my mom would break out the beloved box of Christmas movies for us to binge-watch. The weeks that followed were filled with festive crafts and endless baking, set to the soundtrack of carols sung by Amy Grant, Reba McEntire, and Celine Dion. The memories instilled in me an excessive love for the season.

As a parent, I wanted my kids' holidays to be just as magical. But as more traditions piled on, it started to feel a lot less merry. I found myself wondering which of us cherished the long line for photos with Santa, who terrified my eldest daughter (whom I'd wrangled into a dress she hated). I gleefully filled our calendar with events, only to feel the burnout later.



The author's children—including her daughter in the purple snow bibs—pose with Santa.

And then, inspired by rom-coms, we decided to chop our own tree. Except we miscalculated the excursion, and after a day with a tired kid, hangry parents, and a nearly four-hour car ride, dozens of baby spiders descended from their nests into our home. I had wistfully recalled how much I loved getting our tree each year as a kid. Then it hit me: Our tree had always come from a gas-station parking lot across from the mall.

My mom put a lot of effort into making holidays special, but the magic was in the feeling. She shared traditions she genuinely loved in a way that filled our house with warmth and joy. That's what made us love them, too. Trying to do too much had the opposite effect. So I started simplifying our to-do list.

First, we skipped sending holiday cards, a task that had become daunting. Then we found an adorable tree farm 15 minutes from our house with precut options. Now I limit my nostalgia for tree-chopping to the Hallmark Channel. We treasure some traditions (post-Thanksgiving movies, driving around to see lights) and let go of ones we're not loving, along with the mental tally of all the things we "should" do.

Last year, at my kids' request, we went for a photo with Santa. Everyone chose to dress up on their own (matching, to boot!), and then my four-year-old decided that a pair of purple snow bibs was just the thing her outfit was missing. We now have my favorite picture of all time of our four kids. Sometimes less is more, and the simpler route is the most joyful–just like my memories of that twinkling gas-station parking lot.

–AMY MOELLER



Glide Across the Ice

You can skate along the Georgetown waterfront at the Washington Harbour Ice Rink, which stays open from 1 to 10:30 PM on Christmas. Lace up around sunset for extra scenic views under the snowflake lights.

Relax at the Movie Theater

For a luxe filmgoing experience, concessions are delivered to cushy, reclining seats at IPIC Theater in North Bethesda and Alamo Drafthouse in Brentwood and Crystal City. Pair it with dinner at a Chinese restaurant for the ultimate Christmas day combo.





Give Back to the Community

Holiday festivities may not be your thing, but it's also a season for doing good. The Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center on 16th Street hosts an annual day of service on December 25 with a variety of volunteer opportunities, including meal prep, bingo with seniors, food delivery, and more. W


CityCenterDC
STYLE. DINE. CULTURE.
RETAIL AKRIS ALLEN EDMONDS ARC'TERYX BREITLING BRIONI BRUNELLO CUCINELLI BVLGARI BURBERRY
CHANEL CH CAROLINA HERRERA CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN COREPOWER YOGA DAVID YURMAN DIOR FERRAGAMO
GIORGIO ARMANI GUCCI HERMÈS ISAIA JO MALONE LONDON KATE SPADE NEW YORK LONGCHAMP LORO PIANA
LOUIS VUITTON MONCLER MORGENTHAL FREDERICS PAUL STUART SCANLAN THEODORE STEFANO RICCI
THERMADOR EXPERIENCE & DESIGN CENTER TIFFANY & CO. TUMI VINCE DINING CENTROLINA
DEL FRISCO'S DOUBLE EAGLE STEAKHOUSE DOLCEZZA ESTUARY PICCOLINA SEVEN REASONS SUMMIT
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LIFE & SHOPPING



WRAP IT UP
Turn the page to find great gifts from local retailers—like Steadfast Supply in Navy Yard.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEADFAST SUPPLY

67 Great Holiday Presents You Can Buy Locally

Art prints, crafting kits, leather goods, toys, and other great finds from local artists, artisans, and shops. Plus, tips for sourcing and giving the best gifts.

By Amy Moeller **Photographs by Magdalena Papaioannou**

Self-Care

Gifts that offer a moment of relaxation and reflection, or a pampering night in



1. Handmade one-of-a-kind artist journal, $120.
2. "Santa Fe" leather wrap journal, $62. Both at Jenni Bick.

3. Kaweco "Art Sport" fountain pen in hickory brown, $150 at Penny Post.

4. Nail lacquer, $21 (top coat) and $38 (color duo "Serving Beauty" and "Redezvous") at MischoBeauty.com.

5. Well Kept bath milk, $28, **Well Kept "Agave" exfoliating cloth,** $20, and **Vesper Bloom eau de parfum by Ayond,** $160. Both at Take Care.

6. "Elwood City Ice" blue-light glasses, starting at $200 at Nurilens.co.

7. Liberty "Surf Shack Hideaway" paint-by-numbers kit, $30. **8. Witchie Wicks Cypress & Pine candle,** $36. Both at Steadfast Supply.

9. Flower Seed matchbooks, $18 for decorative box of ten at She Loves Me.

10. Emily Lex Studio winter watercolor workbook, $26, **and paints,** $20, at Red Barn Mercantile.

Kids & Teens

Imaginative toys, artsy activities, and fun games for a range of ages



1. Capital Stitch Co. "The District" embroidery kit and step-by-step guide, $32 at Steadfast Supply.

2. Wooden forklift, $126. **3. Sarah's Silks red play silk,** $22.

4. Wanderlust DC-themed blocks, $38. All at Pippin Toy Co.

5. Animal Friends mosaic sticker activity set, $12 at Steadfast Supply.

6. Moose Match Mayhem game, $10 at Labyrinth Games & Puzzles.

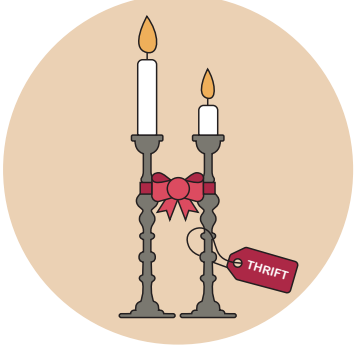
7. *Claris: The Chicest Mouse in Paris* book, $20 at Le Village Marché.

8. Zimbbos elephant block stacking game, $37 at Pippin Toy Co.

9. *Wicked*-themed playing cards, $16 at Penny Post.

10. "Let's Go" coloring kit, $19.50 at Steadfast Supply.

SECONDHAND GIFT GIVING



With all the thrift shops, church bazaars, and vintage stores in the area, shopping local can also mean shopping secondhand—a booming trend fueled by rising prices, a desire for sustainability, and the thrill of the hunt. Maddy Brannon (@MaddytheB), who previews local estate sales to more than 71,000 followers, says the rules for secondhand gift-giving are simple: Look closely to avoid chips, cracks, and blemishes; clean each item before wrapping it up; and don't give holiday decor for the holidays ("Who wants to put new gifts directly into storage?"). Here are some of her favorite presents and advice.

Candlestick holders. Tip: Include fun candles.
Art. "There is so much affordable, unique art."
Glassware. Stick to sets of four or more.
Vinyl records. Cool album covers double as decor, and there's something special about introducing someone to new music—"an algorithm-less gift."
Clothing. Vintage pieces are often higher-quality and also one-of-a-kind—Brannon has found everything from a Masters jacket to nostalgic Disney tees.
Political or government memorabilia. "Senate ashtrays, political buttons, campaign bumper stickers, NASA handbooks are abundant and unique to this area."

Home

Decor, gardening tools, and artwork by local artists



1. Hard-to-kill potted-plant arrangement, $110 at Rewild.

2. "Native Plants of the Mid-Atlantic" dish towel, $25 at Marcella Kriebel Art + Illustration.

3. Pear candle by Scandles, $25 at Tuckernuck.

4. Transplanting trowel, $75.
5. Two-pint Rowley Ripple Copper watering can, $150.
6. Chive Pooley bud vase, $38. All at Georgetown Garden Shop.

7. 15-inch laser-cut wood bowl, $110 at National Building Museum shop.

8. "Georgetown Flower Stroll" print by Cris Clapp Logan, starting at $27 at Etsy.com/shop/CrisLoganArt.

9. National Mall map print, $28 and up at Terratorie.com.

10. Cherry Blossom II Collection "Breath of Fresh Air" print, $50 and up at CarinaTenaglia.com.

11. Handmade salt jar (lid not pictured), $48 at Salt & Sundry.

12. Avocado vase (a pit placed on top sprouts roots for an avocado tree), $65.
13. Acorn vase (oak roots sprout from an acorn), $45. Both at National Building Museum shop.

14. Amber "Betta" vase, $118 at Salt & Sundry.



Entertaining

Presents for anyone who enjoys hosting game nights and dinner parties



1. "Verdure" vase, $92 at Salt & Sundry.

2. Hand-painted ornament, $40 at CarinaTenaglia.com.

3. Estelle Colored Glass wineglass in rose, $185 for six at Tuckernuck.

4. Fall syrup trio, $30 at Shop Made in Virginia and CrescentSimples.com.

5. Candy Cane Sparkle mixer, $24. **6. Spicewalla "Sugar & Spice" trio** of specialty sugars, $26. Both at Red Barn Mercantile.

7. Santa Claus Vintage Puzzle, $24 at Le Village Marché.

8. Provenance 14-year limited-edition bourbon, $260 at the Bourbon Concierge.

9. Wine Cellar game, $20. **10. Finspan game,** $50. Both at Labyrinth Games & Puzzles.

11. *A Screaming Blast: Exceptional Entertaining* book, $45. **12. "Speak EZ" glass in peach,** $48. Both at Salt & Sundry.

13. Peruvian Brothers hot sauce, $7 at La Cosecha.

14. Caramels, $12 and up for a gift bag at MouthPartyCaramel.com.

15. "DMV Pride" coasters by Stitch & Rivet, $38 for four at Saint Helens Leatherworks and the Downtown Holiday Market.

GIFT CARDS

Experiences make great presents for people who have everything. Consider a gift certificate to one of these spots.



For the creative: The Art League. This nonprofit in Old Town offers workshops in stained glass, jewelry making, phone photography, and more.

For the spa-goer: Balian Springs. The wellness retreat in Alexandria offers hydrotherapy pools, saunas, and lounges, plus spa treatments in a space that feels like a resort.

For the theater fan: Arena Stage. Among the upcoming shows of the 2025–26 season—the theater's 75th—is the 1940s-Chicago-set musical *Chez Joey,* a reimagining of the hit *Pal Joey;* the courtroom drama *Inherit the Wind;* and a musical about the R&B/hip-hop trio TLC.

For ice-cream lovers: Yala Greek Ice Cream. This recently opened Georgetown shop—owned by Chrys Kefalas, who is married to local personality Tommy McFly—claims to be the first authentic Greek ice-cream shop in America.

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S

MOUNT ★ VERNON

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Experience America's 250th birthday at the home of our first president. In 2026, tour his renovated Mansion and step into a new immersive exhibition *George Washington: A Revolutionary Life*.

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HOW TO PUT TOGETHER THE PERFECT GIFT BOX



Washington is full of terrific shops with trinkets and goodies ideal for a gift basket or box. To assemble your own, we suggest choosing a theme based on either an occasion (such as game night or girls' night in) or a hobby or interest (painting, cooking, travel, reading).

When you're ready to start gathering items, Candace Ourisman—who once co-owned a concierge gift service—suggests playing with texture, scale, and tone. "I love mixing something indulgent with something practical, something tactile with something consumable," she says. "That balance makes a gift feel layered and elevated, not predictable."

Ourisman also recommends quality over quantity: "A beautifully curated gift doesn't need to be overflowing—a few intentional pieces presented well will feel more luxurious than too many things competing for attention."

Finally, she adds, don't forget the presentation. "I've always thought of the packaging as part of the gift itself. Cohesive but not fussy, with just enough personality in the details—a handwritten tag, a sprig of something seasonal, a chic ribbon."

When in doubt about a theme, try putting together a collection of your own favorite things. Sharing items you genuinely love, says Ourisman, is a way to connect, regardless of how well you know the recipient.

Besides the shops represented in this gift guide, these other local businesses are great places to start:

Laurel Leaf Takoma. A cozy shop of houseplants, used books, and vintage home goods.

Shop Made in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. Hyperlocal offerings of art, jewelry, home goods and more from local makers.

Urban Dwell. A veteran-owned gift shop in Adams Morgan.

Vintage Vintage Vintage. Items from more than a dozen local vintage curators.

Plus: museum shops, which are treasure troves for interesting finds. The National Building Museum's is renowned (see what we found there on page 77), while other favorites include the National Gallery of Art, International Spy Museum, Natural History Museum, Phillips Collection, National Air and Space Museum, and National Museum of African American History & Culture.

Style

From sleek and chic to eclectic and practical—bags, jewelry, and accessories make great gifts

1. Designed for Joy "Millie" bucket bag in green, $98 at Le Village Marché.

2. Laptop portfolio in ginger brown, $70 at TwTote.com.

3. Hansel From Basel embroidered cashmere sailor scarf, $127 at Shelter.

4. Crocodile-embossed Italian leather "Veronika" bag, $2,550 at VieLorie.com.

5. Medium "Cesta" tote in strawberry wine-basket weave, $96 at IxoqBoxi.com.

6. Merino lambswool shawl, $108 at Salt & Sundry.

7. Touchscreen gloves in red, $38 at Le Village Marché.

8. Sapphire spaced cuff bracelet, $4,000. **9. Black jewelry case,** $60. **10. Tiny-beaded ruby necklace,** $695. **11. Gold-fill snake chain,** $275. All at Shelter.



GIANTS

Art from the DEAN COLLECTION *of* SWIZZ BEATZ *and* ALICIA KEYS





Nov 22–Mar 1

VMFA

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

200 N Arthur Ashe Blvd | Richmond

Tickets & Info:
www.VMFA.museum

Organized by BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Deliverance, 2022, Amy Sherald (American, born 1973), oil on linen. The Dean Collection, courtesy of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys.
© Amy Sherald, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth



The Theatre Lab has classes for all ages.

Doing Good

Looking to make a donation with impact? These 21 organizations are recommended by Spur Local, an annual catalog that vets area nonprofits.

By Daniella Byck

If You Want to Support Immigrants

WASHINGTON ENGLISH CENTER
Learning English can help immigrant workers boost their wages, and this group has taught people from more than 100 countries. It also helps students prepare for the citizenship exam. **$150 will buy:** A tutoring scholarship.

CENTREVILLE IMMIGRATION FORUM
The nonprofit helps immigrants advocate for better pay and conditions. In addition to working with wage-theft cases, it offers trade courses. **$500 will buy:** A trade or skill-building class.

MANY LANGUAGES ONE VOICE
This group mentors teen and young-adult refugees and immigrants, provides new moms with baby supplies, teaches digital skills, and reunites detained minors with their families. **$600 will buy:** Diapers and wipes for one year.

If You Want to Support Food and Housing Security

GEORGETOWN MINISTRY CENTER
A few programs are available to DC's unhoused community: a drop-in center for access to food, computers, and laundry; a winter kitchen serving hot dinners; and an outreach team that helps connect people with medical aid, including mental-health services. **$100 will buy:** A tarp, sleeping bag, blanket, and mat for one person.

ANNE'S PLACE
This nonprofit helps people who are at risk of homelessness, moving them into

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN MAXWELL

stable supportive housing. Each apartment building has 11 residents, with access to case managers and holiday meals. **$100 will buy:** One meal for residents in a supportive-housing building.

ADVENTIST COMMUNITY SERVICES OF GREATER WASHINGTON

Serving about 3,000 families a year, the organization hands out food boxes, diapers, and hygiene kits for people experiencing economic insecurity. Training programs cover computer skills, ESOL classes, and more. **$500 will buy:** A month of hygiene supplies.

If You Want to Support the LGBTQ+ Community

GAY MEN'S CHORUS OF WASHINGTON, DC

Multiple performance groups offer a creative haven for the queer community, including an ensemble for teens. There are also troupes dedicated to dance, pop music, and gospel-style songs, plus a chamber group, all performing around DC. **$100 will buy:** One scholarship for the youth chorus.

THE WANDA ALSTON FOUNDATION

This organization, named in honor of activist Wanda Alston, provides the LGBTQ+ community with access to counseling, transitional housing, and scholarships. **$500 will buy:** A month of transit via Metro for five young people.

THE FREDERICK CENTER

This group holds a variety of community events and support groups, including meetings for parents with trans children, a youth group, and a gathering for people who feel they came out later in life. **$1,000 will buy:** A year of peer-support programs for one kid.

If You Want to Support Education

YOUTH LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

Mentorship programs include separate meetings for elementary- and middle-school-age children, plus an afterschool camp where kids learn how to rock-climb. **$100 will buy:** A week's worth of afterschool snacks.

THE FISHING SCHOOL

Elementary students can enroll in free afterschool and summer programs focused on STEM, the arts, and life skills. More than 8,500 kids and families have participated over 35 years. **$500 will buy:** One year of STEM supplies for a classroom.

COLLEGIATE DIRECTIONS

The nonprofit supports students who will be the first in their families to attend college, offering standardized test prep, help filling out applications, and visits with college representatives. **$1,000 will buy:** Equipment for the computer lab.

If You Want to Support Healthcare

COMMUNITY OF HOPE

This group connects more than 1,600 local families with a range of services, from primary and dental care to temporary housing. It also operates three health centers across the city. **$100 will buy:** One resource session for a family.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINERS

For survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, the evidence-collection process can cause more harm. This group provides trauma-informed care such as medical exams conducted by trained nurses. **$500 will buy:** A training session for a forensic nurse.

KINGDOM CARE SENIOR VILLAGE

People 60 and older who are aging at home can join this community in the District's Ward 8 that connects seniors with rides to appointments, prepared meals, and social activities such as line dancing and outings to the theater. **$500 will buy:** A freezer to hold food for distribution.

If You Want to Support the Arts

THE THEATRE LAB

The organization runs theater courses for children, teens, and adults. Spring-break and summer camps give kids an outlet for creative expression while keeping them busy and cared for during gaps in the school year. **$100 will buy:** Art supplies and food for one summer-camp attendee.

EDUCATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY

Theater isn't always inclusive or accessible to everybody, and this nonprofit works to bridge the gap. It collaborates with groups such as Street Sense Media to work with people who have experienced homelessness, and pair seniors with high-school and college students for script and scene studies. **$100 will buy:** Online sessions for a student over age 55.

CRITICAL EXPOSURE

This nonprofit empowers young people of color to tell their stories through photography. They also learn about community organizing while working on their projects. **$500 will buy:** One DSLR camera and supplies.

If You Want to Support Civic Engagement and Legal Services

DC FISCAL POLICY INSTITUTE

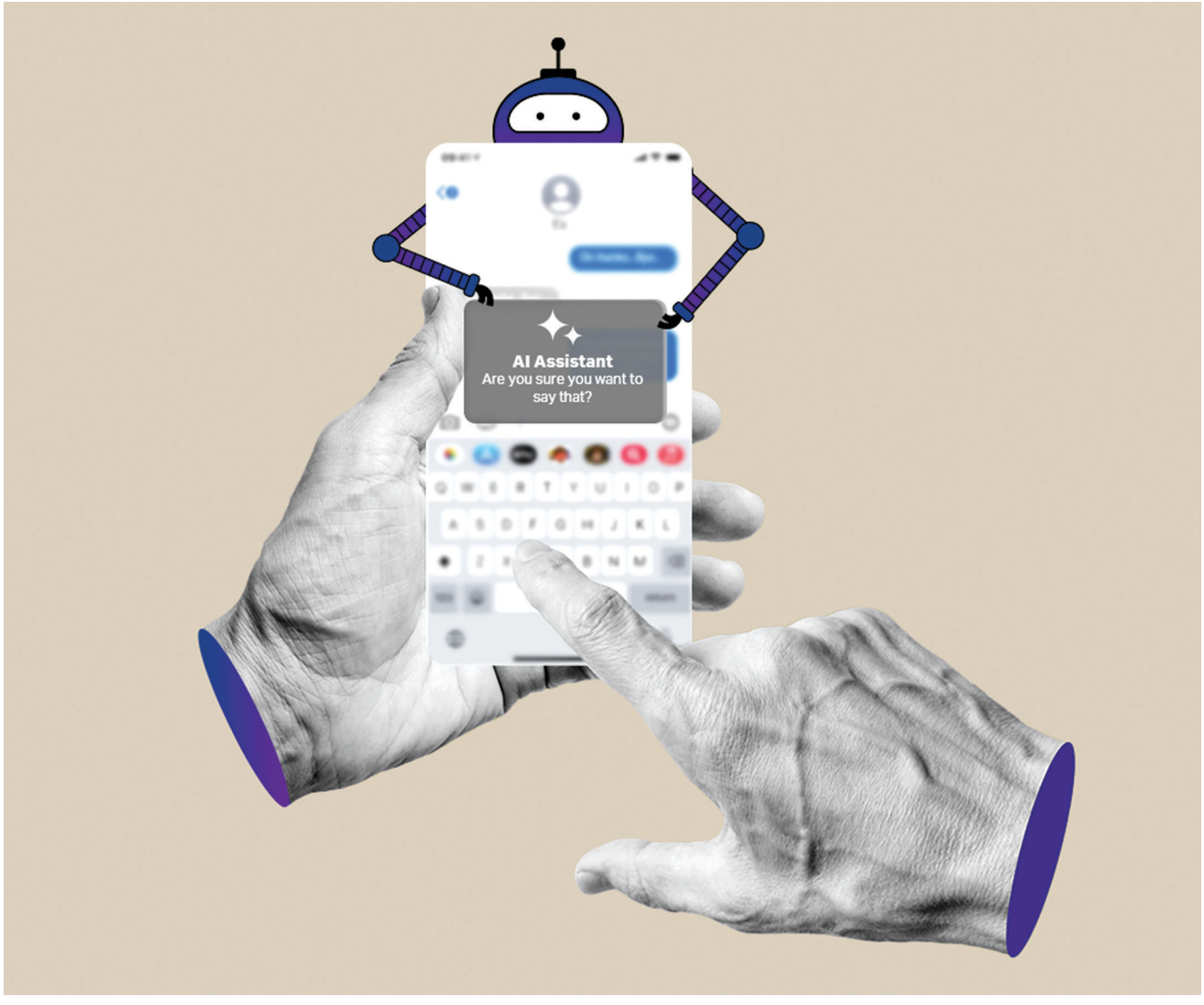
This organization works to close the racial wealth gap in the District by focusing on economic policies—how they affect inequality and what can be done to change that. **$100 will buy:** A budget-and-advocacy training session.

DC GIRLS COALITION

Young women and nonconforming people of color develop leadership skills and organize town halls on issues such as education policy and community safety. **$500 will buy:** Stipends for 20 youth participants.

HARRIET'S WILDEST DREAMS

Prison abolition is at the core of this Black-led nonprofit, which operates a court-watching program, helps incarcerated mothers and caretakers, and trains responders on how to intervene during a crisis without calling police. **$1,000 will buy:** Medical equipment for responders. W



An Imperfect Marriage?

Some couples are turning to ChatGPT and other AI tools to help navigate a divorce. Here's what local lawyers are seeing—for better and for worse.

By Amy Moeller

CALCULATED CORRESPONDENCE

Communication can be tricky during a divorce—the process emotional, the stakes often high. Increasingly, people are looking at artificial-intelligence programs like ChatGPT and Google Gemini to help draft texts and emails, particularly in cases with high-conflict spouses or contentious co-parenting.

"I'm seeing a lot of people pre-clearing their communications—before they send it to the other side, or their ex—through ChatGPT," says attorney Jill Seiferth of Bean, Kinney, & Korman. "These are people who are more cognizant of 'Maybe I can send this in a better way' or 'How do I not inflame the situation?'—which I think has actually been beneficial. AI offers that help to make it less emotional and more productive."

While using AI may be new, vetting communication during litigation is not. Seiferth has on occasion offered to clear something for a client or give them a "gut check," but lately she's seen improved communication across the board, with clients telling her they're running things through a chatbot.

The co-parenting app OurFamilyWizard—which lawyers often recommend to couples to keep a record of messages, along with shared calendars for kids' activities and appointments—has for years had a ToneMeter feature to detect and flag instances where there's an issue with the tone of a message, but its recently launched AI-driven version can now also propose "neutral" edits.

"I've certainly resorted to helping clients draft emails, and you can imagine how ex-

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY NIKY CHOPRA WITH PHOTOGRAPH BY BORIS ZHITKOV/GETTY IMAGES

pensive that might be at a lawyer's hourly rate," says Sean Schmergel of Schmergel & Mersberger. "So this kind of tool is useful and probably saves people a lot of money."

Keeping the communication in check is important not only for the overall impact on the relationships involved but also for the outcome. When courts hear difficult custody cases, Schmergel says, it's not unusual for text messages and emails to be presented in evidence: "I've had cases where there were extremely negative or denigrating comments or expletives used in communications between the parties that had an adverse impact on the outcome of the case." His standard advice to people is to ensure that correspondence is concise, cordial, and respectful.

"These emails will definitely come back in the litigation if you've gone off the rails," Schmergel says. "When a judge sees that, they're going to think, 'This is somebody who is unable to effectively communicate and co-parent. This is somebody who doesn't have the appropriate level of respect for the other parent.' That could absolutely affect the outcome of a custody litigation."

On the flip side, Sanford Ain of Ain & Bank warns that when tensions aren't as high and it's possible for two parties to communicate personally, a human touch–rather than stripping all the emotion from communication–can be better. "There's a sterility to electronic communication that removes the negative emotion," Ain says, "but it also removes the ability to let the other person know that 'I still have feelings for you and for our kids and would love to get along.' That's missing or diminished significantly by the new ways of communicating."

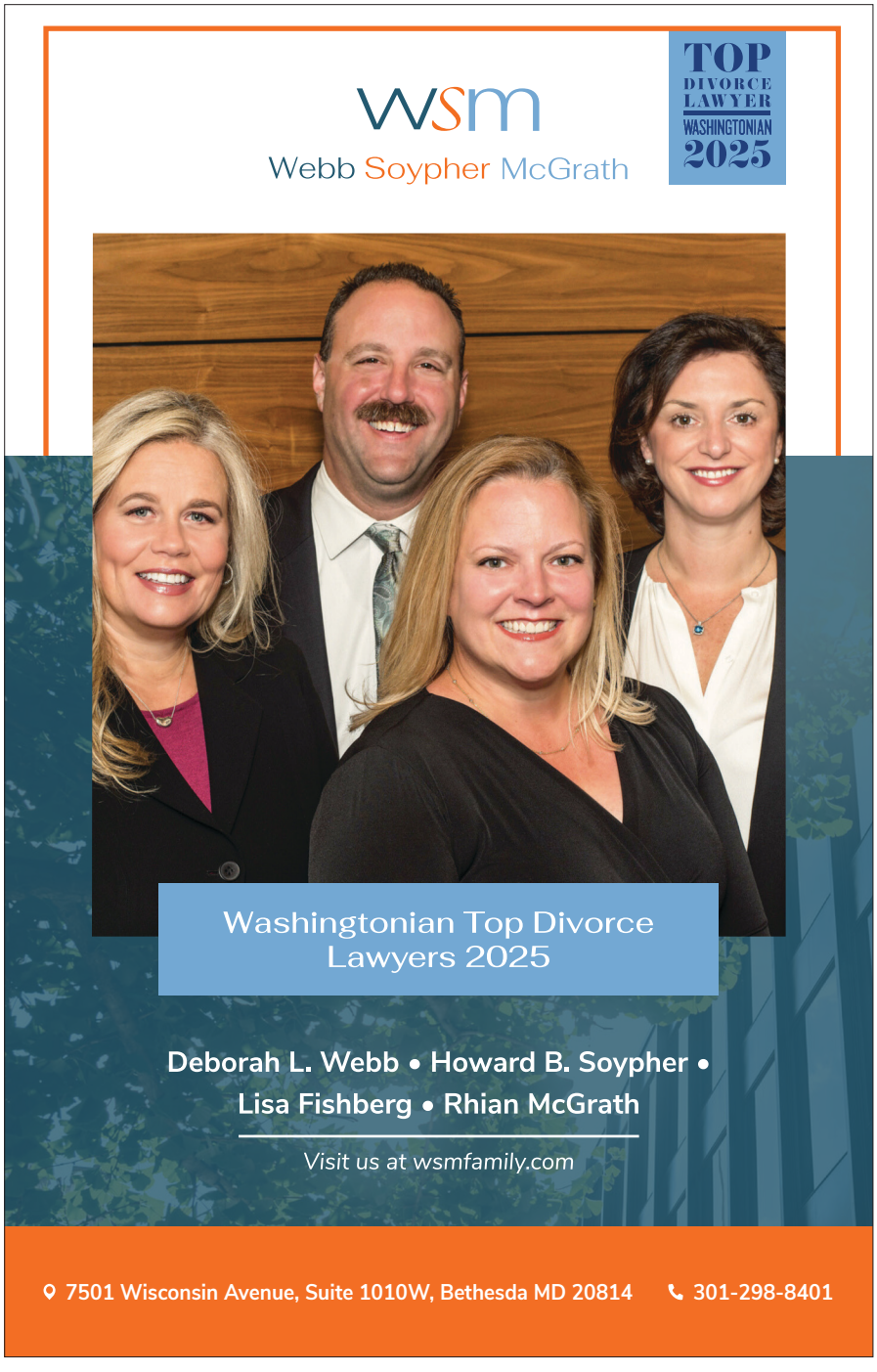
WHEN AI GOES WRONG

Although seeking writing help from a tool like ChatGPT can be helpful when the intent is well-meaning, Cheryl New of New & Lowinger–who says she would recommend that a client stop using AI tools "in a New York minute" if she found out–recently saw it all backfire in a major way: During a high-conflict custody case, New noticed that the opposing party's written communication drastically changed once litigation began, while their verbal communications to her client, she says, continued to be "quite vitriolic." She was able to argue that the opposing party wasn't as cooperative as they appeared in writing. New says they were able to present to the court written communication that had taken place before the start of litigation and compare it to what was being written during, to highlight the change.

"The level of cooperation in those emails was a total sham," New says. "What ended up happening in court–and the judge was very attuned to this–was we actually produced some of the emails and text exchanges where you could tell the font was just copied and pasted from ChatGPT. It has kind of a formulaic approach–stylistically, it was clearly AI-generated," New says. "We were able, in discovery, to make [the other party] produce what they'd originally asked ChatGPT. It did not go well for them, to say the least."

The concern for the court, New says, was that this person was saying one thing and doing something else–a false attempt to show cooperative communications on their part.

For that case, New says, they didn't for-



ensically access the ChatGPT history—the sender had printed copies of all the communication, including not only the messages that ChatGPT had produced but also what was put into the tool, and in a discovery request, New was able to ask for anything that had been printed.

Seiferth says she knows of at least one lawyer who has attempted to subpoena ChatGPT (though she's unsure of the details of the case): "You can issue a subpoena to cellular companies, internet companies, trying to pull data or information that a party has used, or to compel the production of a device so it can be mirrored so that you can see what has been searched. And so [chatbot histories] would arguably be discoverable."

Bottom line: Using AI to foster genuine, civil discourse can be helpful, but insincere attempts—like using it to hide hostility from a judge—won't work if the original prompts end up being submitted as evidence.

AN EDUCATIONAL PRIMER

Lawyers we spoke with said that in addition to using AI to check the tenor of messages, they've seen an increase in consulting AI before contacting a lawyer at all.

"A significant percentage of our clients will go online, go to ChatGPT or another AI source, get information about divorce—grounds, factors in determining custody, determining division of property, determining alimony—and be considerably more educated than in years past before AI," says Ain. He says he's fine with people educating themselves in this way—similar to how they have for years via search engines like Google as well as friends they talk to. "But now," with AI, he says, "they're doing it even to a greater extent. Occasionally, you'll come up with some ideas that may assist the lawyer."

But, he cautions, there are limits to the advice AI can dole out. He's had clients ask ChatGPT, *I've got X dollars in the bank, and I've got these properties—what's a good settlement for me?* "ChatGPT will answer that, but it won't answer it in the same way that a lawyer who can empathize with the family dynamics and the client can," Ain says.

What's more, Seiferth warns, ChatGPT can become an age-old distraction in a new form: "In a divorce, when people talk to a lot of people—'Oh, my friend, my brother, my neighbor said'—everybody has a different experience, and if you're constantly getting data points and responding to them, your case isn't going to be linear." Consulting AI can have a similar effect, she says, leaving clients feeling less confident in their decisions, making them second-guess themselves, and often costing them more. "You have to be careful with how much you're taking in and how much weight you're giving that."

New agrees: "It's often detrimental, because there's such an information flow and people aren't at their best when they're going through [divorce]—they're not necessarily calm, rational, logical. They can be influenced improperly or inappropriately."

Rather than seeking legal advice from AI, Seiferth suggests putting the tool to use analyzing and synthesizing data as needed, such as poring over receipts and costs related to child support or other expenses in financial statements. Ultimately, she says, "you just have to be mindful of how you use it. How much authority are you giving this thing?"



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TOP DIVORCE LAWYERS

These divorce attorneys were voted by fellow lawyers as the best among their peers. We started with our most recent list of Top Lawyers, from December 2024, then conducted more reporting and research to update the section on divorce and family attorneys. The following are the people to see for prenups, splits, custody disputes, and other family-law issues.

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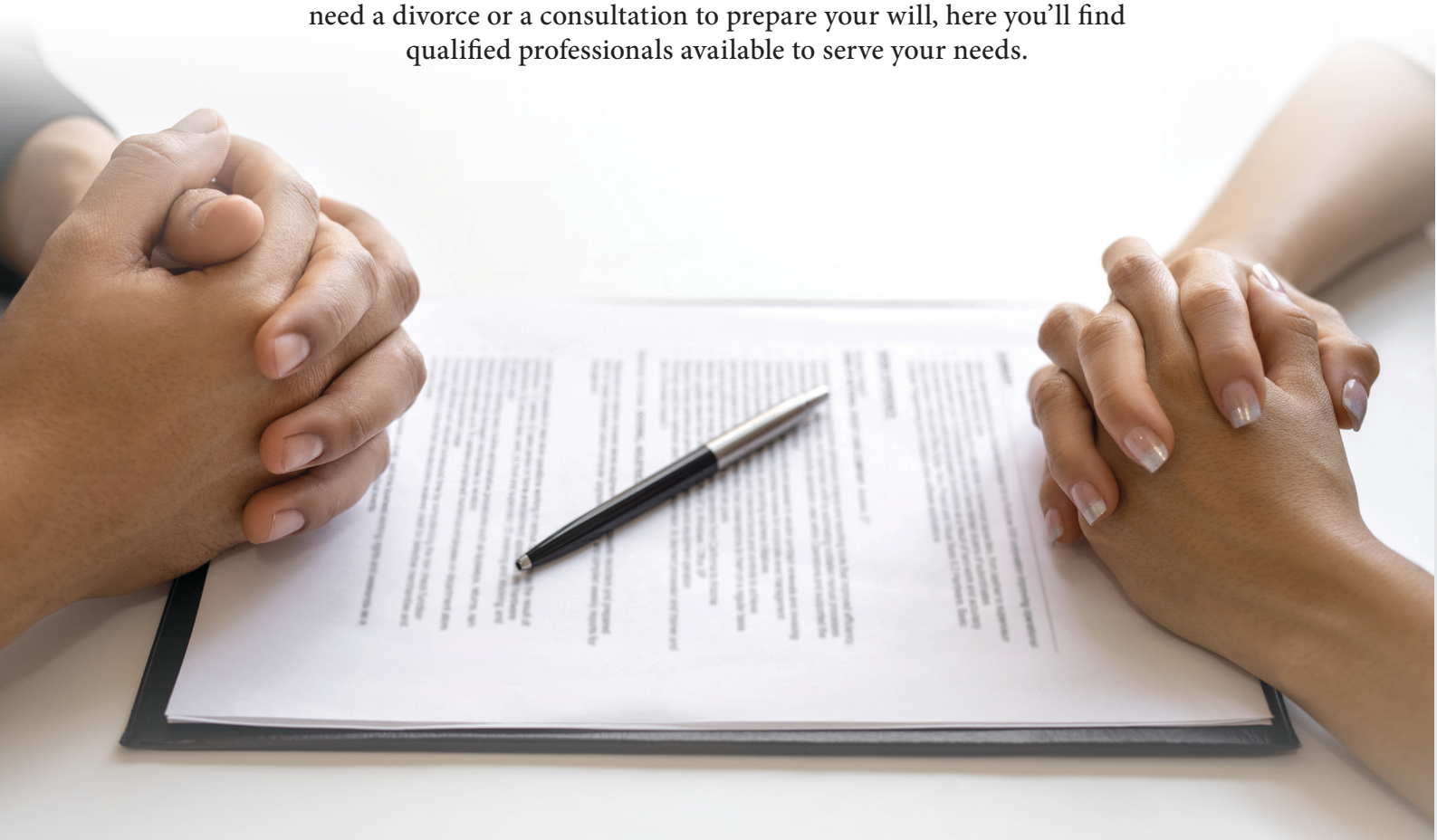

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A
Alice Ahearn 101
Ain & Bank, PC 89
Alden Law Group, PLLC 98
Morgan P. Appel, Esq 91

B
Kristina Badalian, Esq 91
Bean, Kinney & Korman 90
Brodsky Renehan Pearlstein & Bouquet, Chtd 98
Burr Law Firm 93

C
Cipriani & Werner, PC 99
Heather Collier 100
Culin, Sharp, Autry & Day, PLC 91
Curran Moher Weis, PC 94

D
Diaz Vidales, PLLC 100

E
Eris Law Group 101

F
Feldman Jackson, PC 93
Florance Van Scoy, LLC 92

G
Anne E. Grover, Esq 91
Grover & Badalian, LLC 91

H
Hicks Crandall Juhl, PC 90
Hostetter Strent, LLC 94
Julie Hottle Day, Esq 91

L
Lerch, Early & Brewer 101

M
Ritika Malkani 100
Mullett Dove & Bradley Family Law, PLLC 95

N
New & Lowinger, PC 88

O
Offit | Kurman 99

P
Caroline C. Palmer, Esq 91
Paradiso, Taub, Sinay & Kostecka, PC 92
Patterson Bookwalter, PLLC 100
Brian K. Pearlstein, Esq 98
Powell Radomsky, PLLC 96

R
Reinstein, Glackin & Herriott, LLC 97
Chris Roberts 100
Roberts Family Law 100

S
Sean P. Schmergel 97
Schmergel & Mersberger, PLC 97

T
K. Leigh Taylor 101
Taylor Huguley Powers, PLLC 101
Tucker Family Law 96

V
Florance Van Scoy, LLC 92

Z
Sogand Zamani 95
Zamani & Associates, PLLC 95

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Pictured left to right: Jennifer McCammon, Lynn Hawkins, Theresa Mihalik, and Christian Lapham.

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AREAS OF PRACTICE

Domestic relations

DESIGNATIONS & AWARDS

Washingtonian Top Lawyers
U.S. News Best Law Firms
Best Lawyers
Rated by *Super Lawyers*
Northern Virginia Magazine Top Lawyers
Arlington Magazine Top Lawyers
Virginia Business Legal Elite

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Arlington, VA 22201
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mdbfamilylaw.com


Sarah Zimmerman, Jonathan Dana, Katherine O'Rourke, Marina Barannik, Jennifer Davison, Emily Baker

Tucker Family Law

PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR FUTURE

Congratulations to Tucker Family Law's 2025 *Washingtonian* Top Lawyers: Emily Baker, Marina Barannik, Jonathan Dana, Jennifer Davison, Katherine O'Rourke and Sarah Zimmerman.

Tucker Family Law celebrates our six partners recognized among *Washingtonian's* 2025 Top Lawyers — Sarah, Jonathan, Katie, Marina, Jennifer and Emily. Leading our award-winning Tucker team, they bring decades of experience, compassion and in-depth knowledge to help clients protect what matters most and move forward with confidence in the years ahead. For over 50 years, Tucker PLLC's attorneys have guided clients through the full spectrum of divorce, custody and other family transitions. With a team of 14 highly respected attorneys — many frequently recognized by *Washingtonian*, *Best Lawyers*® and *Super Lawyers*® lists — the firm is known for its creative, individualized approach to resolving family law matters.

Skilled in handling all family law issues, including complex, high-net-worth and high-profile cases, we serve clients seeking a long-term view, individualized attention and thoughtful future planning. One of the largest family law practices in the region, Tucker provides sophisticated representation across Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia. Our attorneys are experienced in negotiation, litigation, Collaborative Law and mediation, tailoring approaches to meet each client's unique goals and needs.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Complex divorce and custody, high-net-worth/high-profile matters, child/spousal support, pre-/post-nuptial agreements, international family law

SELECT AWARDS

Tier 1 — 2026 *Best Law Firms*®, Family Law & Family Law Mediation (D.C.); 2026 *Best Lawyers in America*® and 2025 *Super Lawyers*® (D.C.)

1225 19th St. NW, Suite 400
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Powell Radomsky, PLLC

FAMILY LAW ATTORNEYS

We provide a high level of personal service and care that traditional firms often lack. Our team of attorneys and staff is focused solely on attending to the unique needs of family law clients. After understanding your history, concerns, and goals, we will educate you about the law, and we will discuss all of your options and our recommendations. We are able to represent you in mediation or the collaborative divorce process, which can be private. We are also able to represent you in litigation, and we take great pride in our trial work and reputation in the local courts.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Complex asset division, business valuation, support, custody, trial work, collaborative divorce, and mediation

AWARDS

U.S. News & World Report Tier 1, *Northern Virginia Magazine, Super Lawyers*™ – Top 50 Women and Top 100 Attorneys

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Liz Reinecke


Randall Herriott


Maureen Glackin


Brendan Madden


Daniel Renart


Paul Reinstein


Shelby Whale

Reinstein, Glackin & Herriott, LLC

FAMILY LAW, MILITARY DIVORCE, MEDIATION | ANNAPOLIS, MD | 301.383.1525 | RGHLAWYERS.COM

Paul Reinstein, Maureen Glackin, Randall Herriott & Daniel Renart are recognized as among the premier family law practitioners in Maryland. Mr. Reinstein, Ms. Glackin and Mr. Renart are all Fellows in the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML), and Mr. Reinstein and Mr. Renart are both Fellows in the International Academy of Family Lawyers (IAFL). Ms. Glackin is recognized nationally for her expertise in military divorce & pension issues. Mr. Reinstein is past President of the MD Chapter of AAML & past Chair of the MD State Bar Association (MSBA) Family Law Section. Mr. Renart is a past President of the MD Hispanic Bar Association and is the immediate Past Chair of the MSBA Family Law Section.

Mr. Reinstein, Ms. Glackin, Mr. Herriott & Mr. Renart have been recognized as *Super Lawyers*™ in MD and by *Best Lawyers Magazine* for many years. Ms. Glackin and Mr. Reinstein were both recently named Family Law Lawyer of the Year for Annapolis, MD by *Best Lawyers Magazine*. Mr. Renart was named to the Daily Record 2025 Family Law Power List, and Mr. Reinstein and Ms. Glackin have both previously been named to the Family Law Power List. These lists recognize the finest practitioners of family law in Maryland.

DESIGNATIONS & AWARDS

Paul Reinstein: Fellow, AAML; Top 100 MD *Super Lawyers*™; *Washingtonian* Top Lawyer; Family Law Lawyer of the Year for Annapolis

Maureen Glackin: Fellow, AAML; Top 50 MD Women *Super Lawyers*™; Top 100 MD *Super Lawyers*™; Daily Record 2023 Family Law Power List

Randall Herriott: MD *Super Lawyers*™

Daniel Renart: Fellow, AAML; MD *Super Lawyers*™; Nominated by *Best Lawyers*®, Best Law Firms & Top Attorneys since 2016; Daily Record 2025 Family Law Power List



Sean P. Schmergel

SCHMERGEL & MERSBERGER, PLC

With nearly 22 years of family law practice with Schmergel & Mersberger, Sean P. Schmergel is recognized as one of the region's top divorce lawyers. He has successfully represented clients in highly complex domestic matters in both Virginia and DC, frequently litigating high-conflict cases involving significant assets and child custody disputes. Mr. Schmergel vigorously advocates for his clients in court, and, as a well-respected and seasoned trial attorney, often resolves cases without the need for protracted litigation. He is committed to achieving the best possible outcome for every client.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Divorce, property division, custody, child and spousal support, premarital and separation agreements, protective orders.

DESIGNATIONS and AWARDS

Recognized as a top family law attorney by *Washingtonian*, *Super Lawyers*™, *Best Lawyers*®, *VA Business* Legal Elite, *Northern Virginia Magazine* & *Arlington Magazine*; Martindale AV rated; President-Elect Arlington Bar Assoc; Co-Chair Judicial Screening Comm. and former President Alexandria Bar Assoc.; VSB Disciplinary Comm.; Admitted in VA & DC; certified guardian ad litem for children in VA.

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Alden Law Group, PLLC

EMPLOYMENT & LABOR LAW

Alden Law Group PLLC's partners, Kristin Alden, Jim Eisenmann, and Michelle Bercovici – all of whom have been recognized as *Washingtonian* Top Lawyers -- bring decades of successful employment and labor law experience, whether our clients need representation litigating disputes, advice negotiating employment contracts, or merely legal guidance understanding the complexities of their legal rights and obligations.

Alden Law is a boutique, nationally respected employment and labor law firm with an emphasis on representing federal government employees. Alden Law Group's three partners have over 80 years of experience in the complicated and nuanced field of federal sector employment law. It is the cornerstone of our practice. We represent federal employees in our nation's capital, nationally, and globally, as well as individuals, small business, and non-profits in the private sector in the DMV.

Our dedicated team advocates for our clients' rights in all types of workplace disputes. Our clients face whistleblowing reprisal, discrimination and harassment, unequal pay, denial of medical accommodations, investigations, misconduct / disciplinary matters, and government ethics issues. We provide creative, practical and impactful advice and representation. Alden Law focuses on clients as individuals, taking a holistic approach to find the best way forward.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Federal government employees; Employees – Plaintiffs; Labor Law; Employers – Compliance and Guidance.

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Brian K. Pearlstein, Esquire

BRODSKY RENEHAN PEARLSTEIN & BOUQUET, CHARTERED

Brian, the managing partner at Brodsky Renehan Pearlstein & Bouquet, Chartered, practices all aspects of family law including complex financial issues, business ownership, real estate holdings, securities and alternative investments, personal property, as well as domestic and international custody and support matters. Brian has been practicing for over thirty years. His strength is his advocacy, and he is skilled both in and out of the courtroom. He is committed to advocating for his client's interests through diligent settlement negotiation, mediation, or aggressive litigation.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Divorce & Separation, Property Division, Alimony, Child Custody & Support, Agreements

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS
Fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers, AV Preeminent, *Super Lawyers*™, Top 100 *Super Lawyers*™ 2010-2025, Daily Record Power List 2022, *Washingtonian* Top Lawyer 2015–2025, *Best Lawyers in America*® 2015-2026

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Offit | Kurman

STRATEGIC LEGAL SOLUTIONS FOR BUSINESSES & INDIVIDUALS



Divorce and family law attorneys Sandy Brooks, Cheryl Hepfer, Erin Golding, Samantha Kravitz, and Marshall Yaap have years of experience handling highly complex family law matters, including child support, child custody, alimony, and property distribution. Many of their cases involve significant business and tax issues. They help families navigate intricate legal challenges with innovative and creative guidance. While often able to settle their cases outside of court, they are also skilled and experienced litigators. They understand that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work because each family's issues are unique. Clients benefit from their honest counsel, reputation for professionalism, and ability to be strategic and effective advocates. They are motivated by helping clients get through the toughest of times.

Cheryl and Sandy are Fellows of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) and the International Academy of Family Lawyers. Erin is a skilled mediator and member of the D.C. Academy of Collaborative Professionals. Samantha is highly involved in her community and serves as General Counsel of her synagogue, Temple Beth Ami, in Rockville, MD. Marshall serves as the Co-President of the Maryland Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC).

AREAS OF PRACTICE

All five focus on cases involving high assets and income, complex custody, and international family law matters.

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML), International Academy of Family Lawyers (IAFL), International Academy of Collaborative Professionals, *Super Lawyers™*, *Best Lawyers®*, Lawdragon 500

7501 Wisconsin Ave, Suite 1000W
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Cipriani & Werner, PC

Cipriani & Werner's DC Based Family Law Group is one of the premier family law firms in the Metro area, experienced in high net-worth, complex and multi-jurisdictional divorce; property division; custody and support issues; business evaluation and maintenance; related tax issues and solutions for wealth management and preservation. With offices in D.C., Maryland, Virginia, as well as Florida, Carlos and Eva are highly skilled strategists, negotiators, and litigators, who also work with national, state and specialty bars to improve the practice of law and to increase diversity in the legal profession. They stand ready to zealously advocate on your behalf.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

High net-worth and complex divorce, custody and support matters. National and international inter-jurisdictional matters. LGBTQIA+ legal issues. Prenuptial Agreements. Second parent adoption, third party custody, and child advocacy.

DESIGNATIONS and AWARDS

Lastra: *Best Lawyers in America®*, *Washingtonian* Magazine Top Lawyers
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Patterson Bookwalter PLLC

FAMILY LAW FIRM

We are a boutique family law litigation, collaborative practice, and mediation firm located in Fairfax County, Virginia. We strive to provide compassionate, knowledgeable, and effective advocacy for clients facing a wide-range of domestic relations issues. We take a team approach to our cases, ensuring that your attorney's skillset is the best match for the unique needs of your case. Patterson Bookwalter recently made history with a case of first impression in the United States concerning the division of frozen embryos under a partition statute.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Divorce; asset valuation and division; custody/visitation; collaborative practice; mediation; premarital and postnuptial agreements; frozen embryo disputes

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS

Arlington Magazine Top Attorney (Family Law); *Best Lawyers in America®* (Family Law); AV Preeminent (Martindale)

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Roberts Family Law

CHRIS ROBERTS, HEATHER COLLIER, AND RITIKA MALKANI

Chris Roberts, Heather Collier, and Ritika Malkani are family law and divorce attorneys who represent clients in all aspects of family law, including divorce, property, child custody, support, post-judgment issues, prenuptial and postnuptial agreements, and domestic violence matters. Chris and Heather regularly handle complex financial and child custody matters, are trained in collaborative divorce and as mediators, and both are frequently appointed by the court as Best Interest Attorney's to represent children. Heather also serves as a Parent Coordinator. The firm offers creative and practical solutions to each client's unique challenges and represents its clients with compassion, skill, tenacity, and versatility.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Divorce, Separation Agreements, Custody, Support, Property Division, Prenuptial/Postnuptial Agreements, Mediation, Collaborative Law, Parent Coordination

AFFILIATIONS and AWARDS

Chris and Heather are recognized by the *Washingtonian*, *Super Lawyers™* and *Best Lawyers®*, and both are Fellows of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.

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Diaz Vidales, PLLC

BOUTIQUE ESTATE PLANNING FIRM

Diaz Vidales specializes in comprehensive estate planning for expecting parents and families with young children. We guide parents through naming standby guardians, incorporating life insurance into their plan, and accounting for pets and other financial dependents. Because parents have full lives beyond their children, we plan for business continuity if they own a company and prepare advance directives and health care powers of attorney that lay out their wishes for care. We handle full funding and facilitate family meetings, so selected caregivers and future trustees understand the plan completely.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Estate planning, planned giving, estate administration, business formation, non-profit formation, business disputes

AFFILIATIONS

Admitted in DC, CA, & NV. Member of the D.C. Bar Board of Governors and Washington Performing Arts Junior Board. Named a Top Lawyer under 40 by the HNBA. 2025 Rising Star Award by the HBA-DC. Named a Dynamic Woman of Washington by *DC Modern Luxury*. Named to the Best Lawyers Ones to Watch for 2026 list.

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Alice Ahearn

ERIS LAW GROUP

At Eris Law Group, we help individuals and families across Virginia and D.C. navigate complex legal moments with clarity, dignity, and strategy. Whether you're facing divorce, planning your legacy, or managing a legal dispute, our boutique firm offers personalized, results-driven counsel. Our attorneys deliver honest guidance and thoughtful planning to help you make informed decisions about your future. We help you understand your options and their long-term impact. Eris Law Group is dedicated to offering exceptional legal services at fair, transparent prices. We recognize that quality legal representation shouldn't be out of reach, which is why we work hard to provide real value to our clients while keeping our services accessible.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Divorce Litigation, Collaborative Divorce, Family Law (including custody, child support, spousal support and negotiated settlement)

AREAS SERVED
Northern Virginia (Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, and Prince William) and Washington D.C.

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Lerch, Early & Brewer

FAMILY LAW ATTORNEYS SERVING THE DC REGION

Lerch Early's highly respected team of family lawyers represents clients in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. Our attorneys are responsive—they're excellent listeners and they include you in the process every step of the way, so you understand your rights and responsibilities. Our clients benefit from the experience of a boutique family law shop within a large, full-service law firm. Some divorces involve complex real estate, business, tax, employment, estate or criminal defense issues. When they do, our clients benefit from close collaboration between our divorce attorneys and their colleagues in the firm's other practice areas. We are hands-on, capable and fully involved in every step of the process.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Alimony, Asset Distribution, Child Support, Custody, Post-divorce Modifications, Prenuptial/Post-nuptial Agreements, Mediation, Guardianship

AFFILIATIONS and AWARDS
Washingtonian Top Lawyers, *Super Lawyers*™, *Best Lawyers*®, Best of Bethesda, *Bethesda Magazine* Top Attorneys, Daily Record Power List, American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers

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K. Leigh Taylor, Attorney at Law

TAYLOR HUGULEY POWERS PLLC

K. Leigh Taylor is a partner with Taylor Huguley Powers PLLC. Leigh has helped clients navigate their family law cases throughout Northern Virginia for more than 20 years. She provides her clients with sound advice that enables them to make positive decisions for their best interests and their family's best interests. Leigh can negotiate and/or mediate for her clients' cases for settlement purposes and is trained in collaborative law. She is also an experienced litigator and zealous advocate in court. She works with clients that have pre-marital matters and/or post-divorce modification issues. Among other accolades, Leigh is recognized as a top family law attorney in Virginia by *The Best Lawyers in America*© and in the Top 50 Women Virginia Super Lawyers by *Super Lawyers*®.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Divorce and Family Law, Complex and High-value Equitable Distribution, Custody/Visitation and Support, Post-Divorce Modifications, Protective Orders

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS
Immediate Past President, Fairfax Bar Association; Past President, Northern Virginia Chapter, VWAA; Director, Fairfax Law Foundation; Gold Member, Rule 6.1 Society, LSNV

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DINING GUIDE



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TASTE



HOT PLATES
Fancy crab rangoon at Lucky Danger is one of the best dishes we tried in 2025. Turn the page for more favorites.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RACHEL PARAOAN

Dishes *of the* Year

Brazilian bar snacks, baked Alaska, and 20 more of the greatest things we ate in 2025



By Ann Limpert, Jessica Sidman, Ike Allen, and Sara Rosenblum

Hummus With Escargots

La' Shukran

417 Morse St., NE (alley entrance)

Before his hit Palestinian and Levantine restaurants Albi and Yellow, chef Michael Rafidi worked in French kitchens. He'd always loved escargots with maître d' butter—why not put them on hummus? "That's where the concept kind of started, bringing a couple different worlds together," Rafidi says of La' Shukran, his French-meets-Middle Eastern bistro/bar in Union Market. The clever combination of silky chickpea dip topped with smoky snails and herby, arak-spiked butter is now a signature on the menu. Swipe it up with sesame-crusted bread.

Dadinhos de Tapioca ↑

Cana

2412 18th St., NW

Come for the caipirinhas and vinyl vibes, stay for the Brazilian bar snacks at this lively Adams Morgan spot. In particular, no bite is more alluring than these crispy tapioca squares with creamy, mochi-like centers made with Brazilian Canastra cow's-milk cheese—ideal for dipping in a sweet-spicy guava sauce. Pair the dish with the Romeu e Julieta, a rum-and-sherry cocktail infused with guava and cream cheese.

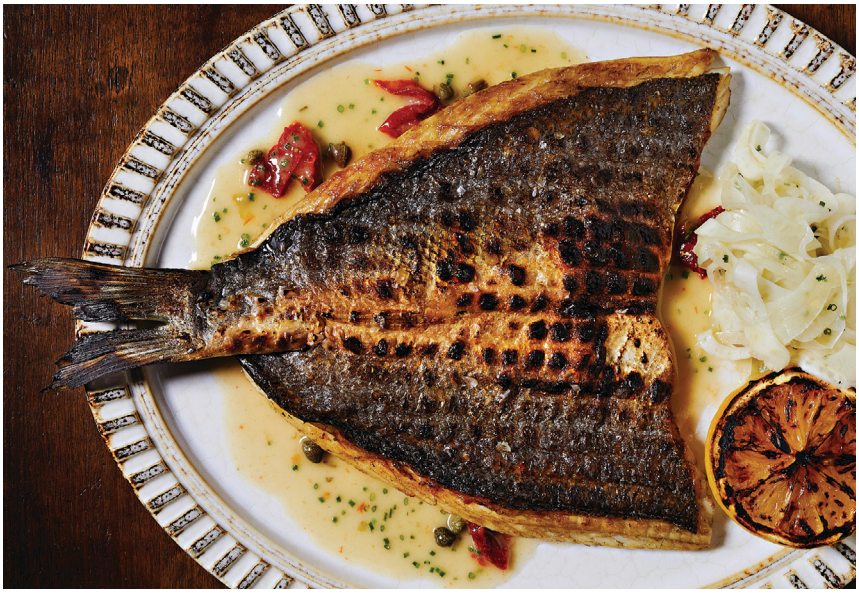
Bulgogi Baek Ban

Baek Ban

13934 Metrotech Dr., Chantilly

Served on gleaming polished metal trays, the eponymous baek ban (rice-based set meals) at this Chantilly spot have as many variations as chef/owner Young Sun Han has recipes for banchan, traditional Korean side dishes. Alongside a main dish of smoky-sweet bulgogi, you might end up with cubed radish kimchi, an omelet sandwiched by whole perilla leaves, dried anchovies glazed with soy sauce, potato-apple salad, or sweet-potato-starch noodles stir-fried in sesame oil. The permutations are endless—and wonderful.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HAWKEYE JOHNSON



Arrosticini

Bar del Monte

3054 Mount Pleasant St., NW

These rustic, dainty skewers of lamb are grilled and served up with such offhand confidence that they feel somehow timeless, like something you might order at a century-old wine bar in Abruzzo. In fact, they've been around only since 2024, when Bar del Monte opened in Mount Pleasant. Brushed with chili oil and lemon, they're the perfect prelude to Oliver Pastan's pizza, the progeny of the pies his parents serve at 2 Amys.

Tuna Tartare

Brasserie Royale

46290 Cranston St., Sterling

Tuna tartare often skews toward Asian flavors. At this pretty French place in Sterling, the kitchen takes a different tack: Cubes of yellowfin tuna, briefly cured in brown sugar and salt, are dressed up like steak tartare, with capers, shallots, cornichons, and a healthy dollop of the tangy, mustard-and-mayo "house sauce" that elevates several dishes here.



TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB LINDSAY; MIDDLE BY REY LOPEZ; BOTTOM COURTESY OF BRASSERIE ROYALE

Grilled Whole Branzino

Bouboulina

921 Meeting St., North Bethesda

This refined Pike & Rose restaurant feels like a classic American steakhouse, and it's easy to forget that it has Greek roots. (The owners are also behind Cava and the nearby Melina.) A wonderful reminder: the whole grilled branzino both procured from Greece and prepped with Mediterranean technique. The fish is cured in sugar, salt, coriander, and citrus, then air-dried for a few days so the skin gets extra crispy when it's grilled. The tangy accoutrements—cured-lemon vinaigrette, pickled fennel, capers, and gremolata—show it off beautifully.



Buffalo Wings

Upstate FTW

1314 U St., NW

It's a question we get almost monthly: Who makes the best Buffalo wings in town? You'll find the answer inside the U Street bar Sport & Social, where Anju co-chef (and upstate New York native) Scott Drewno has taken over the food side of the operation. The wings arrive at your table just the way you'd hope—hot, perfectly crispy, and drenched in Frank's hot sauce and butter. What sets them apart is the behind-the-scenes technique: The chicken is brined overnight, chilled for two days, then fried and sauced to order.

Oysters With Beurre Blanc

The Occidental

1475 Pennsylvania Ave., NW

This appetizer at Stephen Starr's chic revamp of the historic Occidental is the definition of quiet luxury. The dish sounds simple enough, but the result is exceedingly elegant thanks to its parts: Chesapeake Bay oysters, top-notch Petrossian caviar, and a lovely beurre blanc to buffer all the brininess.





Cacio e Pepe Bomboloni

Gemini

1509 17th St., NW

What this wine-and-pasta shop/cafe/carryout does best is simple dishes with the absolute best ingredients, workshopped to perfection over weeks and weeks. Look no further than these fried dough balls, encapsulating all the creamy-sharp flavors of cacio e pepe pasta. They're light and airy yet gooey on the inside with Pecorino Fulvi (an aged Romano cheese made in Lazio) and a few different types of black peppercorns for floral, multidimensional spice.

Fried Tamal de Elote

El Viejo Central American Kitchen

9224 Warren St., Silver Spring

When we ordered a sweet-corn tamal at El Viejo, owner Henry Blanco offered us a choice: steamed or fried. We didn't realize the latter was possible. The fried tamal de elote here, it turns out, is surprisingly addictive—a crispy, golden-brown exterior gives way to a rich, sunflower-yellow interior with the texture of pound cake. It's like the best cornbread you've ever tasted, and to gild the lily, there's a side of crema for dipping.

Nashville Hot Chicken Bánh Mì

Bánh Mì Oi

6795 Wilson Blvd., Falls Church

This Eden Center newcomer is already serving some of the best bánh mì around, but it's worth venturing beyond the traditional Vietnamese deli cuts for this Nashville-meets-Saigon sandwich. The chicken is brined for 12 hours, double-fried for extra crunch, and tossed in a fiery wet rub with a medley of chilies. Garlic aïoli and pickled daikon and carrots help balance the heat, which sings more than it screams. Best of all: Bánh Mì Oi bakes its own crackly, airy-as-can-be baguettes.

LEFT PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNE MARLER; RIGHT BY SCOTT SUCHMAN

Baked Alaska

Providencia

1321 Linden Ct., NE

This photogenic dessert, developed by star pastry chef Paola Velez at Erik Bruner-Yang's back-alley cocktail bar—where bar snacks revel in tropical flavors from Taiwan and El Salvador—is an experience in several acts. First, poke your spoon through a layer of blowtorched Dominican-style meringue into a pile of guava-flavored shaved ice. Hidden underneath it all, you might find coconut or grass jelly, fruit purées, or a matcha cream—the exact flavors and textures vary, but it's always a fun, interactive experience.

Podi Masala Dosa

Tiffin Hut

2338 Woodland Crossing Dr., Herndon

The taut menu at Tiffin Hut—a minimalist Herndon strip-mall place that feels like the Apple Store of Bangalorean cuisine—centers on "benne" (or butter) dosas, which might just be the best in the Washington area. A benne dosa is slightly thicker than your typical masala dosa, and it's folded over just once—like a quesadilla—rather than rolled into a cylinder. The inside is squidgy and filled with masala potatoes and podi (a coarse, orange spice mix sometimes called "gunpowder"). The outside is shellacked with butter and griddled until it's crunchy.



Chicago Dog

Bun Papa

1512 Belle View Blvd., Alexandria

This carryout inside Bread & Water Co. bakery specializes in big, messy, but painstakingly rendered burgers on housemade buns. That same vibe applies to the menu's sleeper hit: the Chicago-style hot dog. The oversize frank is quickly deep-fried so its skin remains snappy, and toppings stay traditional—pickle spears, green relish, sport peppers, tomato slices, and yellow mustard. But here, the poppy-seeded brioche bun comes out of the oven, not a bag.



Acorn Squash

Lutèce

1522 Wisconsin Ave., NW

Menu descriptions are spare at this Parisian charmer in Georgetown, so there are often surprises. Take the "acorn squash," which turns out to be a rich bisque hiding beneath cheddar foam and a whiff of vanilla. It arrives inside a whole roasted squash adorned with fresh herbs and dabs of black-garlic gel. We devoured every bite of the savory soup and its vessel—swipe up any last drops with the fantastic sourdough.

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY VINA SANANIKONE; BOTTOM BY KELSEY SHOEMAKER



Scallops a la Plancha

Barbouzard

1700 K St., NW

It's been a while since we've encountered a scallop dish that has wowed us. Until we ordered this appetizer at Barbouzard, the glitzy southern French dining room from former Convivial chef Cedric Maupillier. He starts with the good stuff—first-rate Hokkaido scallops from Japan. One side gets a caramelized sear on the plancha, while the other stays tender and sweet. The scallops don't need much, but Maupillier elevates them with a mild and creamy curry sauce, medallions of silky corn custard, and hits of pickled kombu.

Bao Bei Bowl

Bao Bei

12015 Rockville Pike, Rockville

Lu rou fan, caramel-colored braised pork over rice, is a classic dish in Taiwan. At the new brick-and-mortar outpost of Kevin Hsieh's pandemic-born bao operation, it comes in a fast-casual format under a proprietary name, but its flavor is familiar. Pickled mustard greens and cilantro offset the star-anise-scented richness of the pork belly.

Roasted-Potato-and-Onion Pizza

Inferno Pizzeria Napoletana

12207 Darnestown Rd., Darnestown

Tony Conte's snug neo-Neapolitan pizzeria is always worth a trek up I-270, but his potato-and-onion pie is our favorite reason to get in line before the doors open at 5. Roasted Yukon Golds, onions, and smoked mozzarella meld atop a crisp-chewy crust, every bite a hit of pure comfort. We find ourselves craving the rosemary-scented carb-on-carb masterpiece when temperatures drop, but it's become a year-round menu staple.

Rice-Stuffed Artichoke

My Little Chamomile

3210 Cherry Hill Ln., NW

Chef Cagla Onal-Urel—who also operates the next-door cafe and market Green Almond Pantry—focuses this nine-month-old Georgetown dining room on homestyle Turkish and Mediterranean food, much of it inspired by her mother's cooking. This herb-and-rice-stuffed artichoke, however, is Onal-Urel's attempt to recreate an Aegean dish she first had at a friend's house while growing up in Turkey. A shower of fresh herbs and a squeeze of lemon turn the humble plate into something quite elegant. Look for it during peak heirloom-artichoke season in the spring.

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT SUCHMAN; BOTTOM BY KELSEY SHOEMAKER



Thai Papaya Salad Steak Tartare

Ellie Bird

125 Founders Ave., Falls Church

Tartares border on menu cliché these days, but this is one of the most original and deliciously complex versions we've encountered. The dish starts with a punchy Thai papaya salad that's folded with diced Wagyu teres major, mango, cilantro, and chives. The whole mix is then seasoned with a Thai sweet soy sauce, plus sriracha, lime, and fish-sauce salt. Topping it off: crispy Yukon Gold potato chips dusted with dehydrated scallion and malt-vinegar powder.

Crab Rangoon

Lucky Danger

709 D St., NW

The crab rangoon at the takeout-focused Arlington original tastes like the crab rangoon you'd find at many Chinese American restaurants. The rendition at its more sophisticated Penn Quarter dining room, which opened in May, is far more memorable. A bit of imitation crab nods to nostalgia, but it's mixed with sweeter Norwegian snow-crab meat. Old Bay amps up the gingery cream-cheese filling, pearls of tobiko add salty pop, and a blood-orange agrodolce plays the part of sweet-and-sour sauce.





Chicken alla Diavola

Osteria Mozza

3276 M St., NW

One of DC's biggest hot spots in 2025 has been this Georgetown co-production from Stephen Starr and LA chef Nancy Silverton, which has served folks such as Barack Obama and Jeff Bezos. So come for the people-watching, sure, but also for homey Italian dishes like this Green Circle chicken. It's split, stuffed with butter and rubbed with spices, then roasted with chicken stock over a fat slice of sourdough bread, which soaks up the juices and concentrates their flavor. It's indulgent, but a squeeze of charred lemon brightens up the whole thing.

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERT TING; BOTTOM BY BIRCH THOMAS

The Votes *Are* In

For the 48th year, our readers told us their favorite places to eat

By Ann Limpert



Escargot-topped hummus—also one of our favorite dishes of the year—at La' Shukran

Best New Restaurant

1 **La' Shukran,** Union Market →
Middle Eastern flavors collide with French bistro dishes at Michael Rafidi's ultra-cool restaurant and rooftop.

2 **Chai Pani,** Union Market
This color-blasted newcomer recently arrived from Asheville, where its offbeat Indian street food won a James Beard Award.

3 **Osteria Mozza,** Georgetown
Star Los Angeles chef Nancy Silverton has won plenty of fans with her mozzarella bar, Italian snacks, and famed desserts in the former Dean & DeLuca space.



Moon Rabbit's pandan sponge cake

Best Service

1 **Albi,** Navy Yard
You may be tempted to order everything on the menu, but servers will skillfully help you navigate it.

2 **Rose's Luxury,** Capitol Hill
Still one of the most fun places to eat in DC, with engaging waitstaff you'd want to hang out with.

← 3 **Moon Rabbit,** Penn Quarter
You'll be glad servers turned you onto delights like durian mousse and eel mochi beignets.

Coolest Decor

1 **El Presidente,** Union Market
Trippy bar decor meets a theatrical dining room at Stephen Starr's mod-Mex spot.

2 **Maydan,** 14th Street corridor
It's tough to beat decorative elements like the central copper-domed hearth with a roaring fire.

3 **Chai Pani,** Union Market, → and **Filomena,** Georgetown (tie)
The Indian restaurant Chai Pani is awash in vibrant paintings both inside and out. Filomena, the 42-year-old Italian institution, is crammed with whimsical tchotchkes.

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY HAWKEYE JOHNSON; BOTTOM BY RACHEL PARAOAN



Albi's octopus shish



Caprese salad at Caruso's



Joon's crispy sardines

TOP PHOTOGRAPHS, FROM LEFT, BY REY LOPEZ, BY STACEY WINDSOR, AND COURTESY OF JOON; BOTTOM LEFT BY TIM ROBINSON; BOTTOM RIGHT BY JEFF ELKINS

Best in DC

1 Albi, Navy Yard ↑
Michael Rafidi's Levantine flagship has racked up awards—this year, it also took the number-one spot on *Washingtonian's* 100 Very Best Restaurants list.

2 Cucina Morini, Mount Vernon Triangle
Coastal Italian crudos and pastas are served up in a buzzy dining room.

3 Yellow, Georgetown, Union Market
Rafidi wins again with these twin cafes, known for baklava lattes and labneh-filled croissants.

Best in Maryland

1 Caruso's Grocery, Capitol Hill, ↑ North Bethesda
Italian American pastas and parms stick to tradition but are made with precision.

2 2Fifty BBQ, Mount Vernon Triangle, Riverdale Park
These barbecue spots are rightfully lauded for their Texas brisket, but don't sleep on the pulled pork.

3 Aventino, Bethesda
A swank dining room from the team behind the Red Hen.

Best in Virginia

1 Joon, Tysons ↑
Longtime cookbook writer Najmieh Batmanglij joins forces with ex-Maydan chef Chris Morgan at this sophisticated Persian restaurant.

2 Ellie Bird, Falls Church
Grab a seat in the birdcage booth and dig into Yuan Tang's creative Asian-meets-Euro menu.

3 Stracci Pizza, Del Ray
Square, Roman-style pizzas topped with handmade stracciatella cheese sail out of this snug dining room.





Cocktails

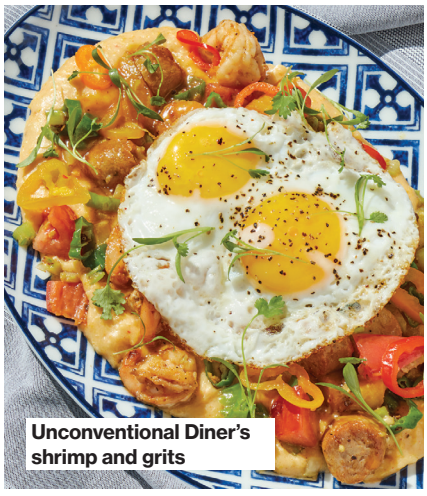
1 Jane Jane, Logan Circle
A tiny hot spot oozing midcentury charm.

2 Cucina Morini, Mount Vernon Triangle
One of the best happy-hour deals in town? The nightly $7 martinis (good ones!) at the bar here.

← **3 The Green Zone,** Adams Morgan
Middle Eastern flavors are shown off in classic and inventive cocktails and mocktails.

Minty lemonade at the Green Zone


Pesto pizza at Timber


Unconventional Diner's shrimp and grits


The dining room at Maydan

Pizza

1 Andy's Pizza, multiple area locations
When that hankering for a New York slice hits.

2 Martha Dear, Mount Pleasant
The unique Mediterranean pies feature toppings like kefalotyri cheese on sourdough crusts.

3 Timber Pizza, Petworth ↑
Thin, neo-Neapolitan pizzas can be had with drizzled pesto, spicy fruit jam, and more.

Brunch

1 Unconventional Diner, Shaw ↑
Have a weekday hankering for sweet-potato shakshuka? Brunch at this eclectic spot is served daily until 3:45.

2 Ambar, Capitol Hill, Shaw, Clarendon
You can "dine without limits" at these Balkan restaurants, which specialize in all-you-can-eat parades of flatbreads, mezze, and kebabs.

3 Le Diplomate, Logan Circle
This still-hopping brasserie is one of the earliest weekend risers in the neighborhood. Onion soup at 9:30 AM? We're in!

Special Occasion

1 Albi, Navy Yard
Spring for the Sofra menu of five chef-chosen courses.

2 The Dabney, Shaw
This Blagden Alley tasting-menu restaurant is one of DC's coziest spaces for winter dining.

3 Maydan, 14th Street corridor ↑
Live it up with za'atar martinis and ras al hanout–spiced duck.


Breakfast pastries at Yellow


Pork and steak tacos at Taco Bamba


Joia's Wagyu smash burger

Bakery

1 Rose Ave Bakery, Woodley Park
Colorful Asian-accented sweets—pandan-coconut doughnuts, ube kouign amann—line the glass cases.

2 Yellow, Georgetown, Union Market ↑
Find creative Levantine breakfast pastries and excellent freshly made pita.

3 Bread Furst, Van Ness
Our go-to for baguettes, Montreal-style bagels, and old-school sweets like lemon meringue pie.

Tacos

1 La Tejana, Mount Pleasant
Best breakfast tacos in town.

2 Taco Bamba, multiple area locations ↑
Try tacos stuffed with vindaloo or a patty melt.

3 Taqueria Habanero, Columbia Heights, Edgewood, College Park
Family-run spots with freshly made corn tortillas and traditional meats.

Burger

1 Duke's Grocery and **Duke's Counter,** Dupont, Foggy Bottom, Potomac (Duke's Grocery); Woodley Park (Duke's Counter)
The "proper burger" comes with arugula, aïoli, sweet chili sauce, and more.

2 Lucky Buns, Adams Morgan, Union Market
We're seriously into the green-chili-topped El Jefe burger.

3 Joia Burger, Mount Pleasant ↑ Glover Park
Top-quality smash burgers made with Wagyu beef, plus great fries.

TOP PHOTOGRAPHS, FROM LEFT, BY JEFF ELKINS, LIA MANFREDI, AND SCOTT SUCHMAN; BOTTOM, FROM LEFT, COURTESY OF YELLOW, BY SCOTT SUCHMAN, AND BY ALBERT TING


Lutèce's pear mille-feuille

French

1 Le Diplomate, Logan Circle
DC's most famous brasserie suits many an occasion–from brunch with kids to a celebratory dinner à deux.

2 Lutèce, Georgetown →
The tiny bistro feels straight outta Paris, but chef Matt Conroy's vision is all his own.

3 Bistrot du Coin, Dupont
This old-school bistro with creaky tables and French liquor posters just turned 25.


Planta's watermelon "sushi"

Vegetarian

← **1 Planta** and **Planta Queen,** Bethesda, Dupont
An eclectic mix of plant-based takes on sushi, carbonara, Korean fried chicken, and more.

2 Oyster Oyster, Shaw
One of the more fascinating tasting menus around–all vegan except for an (optional) oyster.

3 Vegz, Adams Morgan
Head to this Indian fast-casual place for dosas and curries.


Wagyu fried rice at Love, Makoto

Japanese

1 Perry's, Adams Morgan
The 41-year-old sushi spot is now a foodie destination, thanks to chef Masako Morishita.

2 Love, Makoto, Judiciary Square ↑
A yakinaku barbecue room, sushi bar, and izakaya under one roof–plus a robust takeout operation.

3 Rakuya and **Raku,** Dupont (Rakuya); Cathedral Heights, Bethesda (Raku)
Fusiony sushi and small plates, plus great happy-hour and lunch deals.


Steamed jackfruit buns at Beau Thai

Thai

1 Siam House, Cleveland Park
A sustainability-minded, family-run destination for spring-roll and drunken-noodles cravings.

2 Baan Siam, Mount Vernon Triangle
Like things "Thai hot"? Chili fiends, this place is for you.

3 Beau Thai, Shaw, Mount Pleasant ↑
A longtime favorite for takeout noodles and dumplings.


Rasika's black cod with honey

Indian

1 Rasika, West End, Penn Quarter ↑
Ashok Bajaj's refined dining rooms showcase elegant curries and whimsical small plates.

2 Daru, H Street corridor
The cocktails are as tasty as the modern Indian cooking.

3 Indigo, NoMa
A fun graffiti-scrawled dining room that rewards spicy palates.

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY NAYAB JADE; MIDDLE COURTESY OF PLANTA; BOTTOM, FROM LEFT, BY MIKE FUENTES, REEMA DESI, AND SCOTT SUCHMAN



Nanglo owner Tikaram Paudel flanked by servers



Tempo Shack chef Sunil Tamang and owner Dipesh Acharya

Nepal Bearers

Two new Himalayan spots are heating up the H Street food scene

By Ike Allen

"THE H STREET CORRIDOR." "THE ATLAS District." At this point, one of DC's most storied nightlife strips may have earned itself an unlikely third title: Little Nepal.

The neighborhood now boasts four places to eat Himalayan dishes such as momo dumplings and choila (spicy grilled meat), including the celebrated Daru and Tapori—primarily Indian restaurants—which Nepalese American chef Suresh Sundas opened in 2021 and last spring, respectively. Then, in September, two Nepalese spots opened near the corner of 13th and H streets, Northeast, within a week of each other—by coincidence, their owners say.

First came Tempo Shack DC, the only takeout window in the District where you can order water-buffalo dumplings. Tempo Shack began as the pet project of Kathmandu-born IT specialist Dipesh Acharya, who started a momo business at a Dallas farmers market before relocating inside a Nepali grocery store in Ashburn two years ago. His new iteration on H Street represents his vision for how to turn Himalayan street food into late-night-drinking fare for US diners.

There's tasty chow mein and grilled-meat sekuwa on a stick, but the dumplings here—hand-wrapped and filled with chicken, vegetables, or water buffalo—are some of the best around. Simply steamed and served with a peanut-spiked tomato chutney might be best for the uninitiated, but you can also order your momos bathed in a reddish jhol sauce or stir-fried in chili sauce, Indo-Chinese style. The filling is up to you, but Acharya says, "When you say momo, every Nepali thinks of water-buffalo momo."

Tempo Shack doesn't compromise on Nepalese cuisine, but it's a pared-down snack bar. To get a feel for the breadth of Nepal's stews, pickles, and pan-fries, you can cross the street to Nanglo, which Tikaram Paudel—a native of Dang, Nepal—opened a week after Tempo Shack. Paudel has owned a series of Indian kitchens around the area, but Nanglo is his most Nepalese.

Huge thali platters let you sample various curries alongside flavorful lentils, mustard greens, fermented radish pickle, and rice. Or opt for a Nanglo set for two (vegetarian or non-vegetarian), which gets you a selection of steamed and fried chili momos, grilled meats or paneer, and mustang aloo, a standout side dish of garlic-chili potatoes.

When I asked about the relationship between the two new Nepali neighbors, Acharya laughed. The Nepalese American community is small, so he and Paudel knew each other a bit, but neither realized the other was preparing to open a restaurant on the same corner within the span of a week. Two Himalayan restaurants that are a momo's throw from each other might be in competition, but economies of scale also help: Acharya now provides the Pennsylvania-raised water buffalo for both places through his wholesale business.

"We help each other out whenever necessary, so it's always good to have a fellow Nepali across the street," Acharya says. "Maybe not so much business-wise, but as a community." W

Tempo Shack DC, 804 13th St., NE; Nanglo, 1301 H St., NE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVY MAGES

HOME



WATER WORLD

This $4 million Spanish-style estate in Potomac recently traded hands. For more luxury home sales, turn to page 138.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF HEIDER REAL ESTATE AND NIBLOCK STUDIOS



ON THE RISE: The Heming, a mixed-use luxury apartment complex in Tysons.

The Briefing

Tysons and Vienna

With a wave of hot restaurants, including Egyptian and Persian joints, as well as a spa offering "facials for your scalp," these Virginia suburbs are brimming with new places to eat, shop, and play

By Kate Corliss and Dara T. Mathis

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE NOW, BUT VIENNA was once dotted with farmland and neighboring Tysons was a quiet rural town, home to a quaint general store. Then came the Beltway and Tysons Corner Center mall in the '60s, drawing crowds to one of the region's first enclosed shopping centers. Fast-forward, just over a decade ago, to the Silver Line's opening, which brought a crush of new development to the neighborhoods: residential buildings, corporate headquarters (hello, Capital One), and plenty of new spots to explore. Here are some of the best recent arrivals.

DINING

Dumpling Delights

Behind the unassuming brick facade of **Panda Dumpling** *(155-B Maple Ave. W.)*, which arrived in Vienna earlier this year, is a cafe/carryout serving authentic Chinese and Japanese classics. There are the dumplings—steamed, fried, and in soup—plus grilled eel over rice, scallion pancakes, and a standout pan-fried bao stuffed with beef. Polish it all off with a sweet treat from the boba menu.

Super Market

The first large grocery store in the area devoted to Japanese goods, **Marufuji** *(8520 Leesburg Pike)* opened in Tysons early this year. Shoppers will find sushi-grade fish, a variety of Wagyu, and unusual Japanese imports like butter cakes—a dessert from the island of Hokkaido, which is renowned for its premium dairy products. In addition to grab-and-go, the supermarket includes a sit-down cafe serving tonkatsu curry, chirashi bowls, and matcha lattes.

Labneh Love

Seray *(160 Maple Ave. W.)* became a neighborhood favorite soon after landing in Vienna last fall. The upscale Lebanese

PHOTOGRAPH BY KATE WICHLINSKI

restaurant specializes in shareable plates: creamy labneh, spiced meat pie, and bright fattoush salad, plus a variety of grilled meats. The cocktail menu includes old standbys—sangria, mojitos—as well as some creative twists on classics, such as a blueberry-coconut margarita and a cold-brew martini.

Hidden Haunt

Named for a Japanese word meaning "hidden," the **Naisho Room** *(1825 Capital One Dr. S.)* at the Watermark Hotel in Tysons lives up to its name. It has no sign or published menu. Tables are booked through a password-protected website: Guests must decipher clues on the restaurant's Instagram page to figure out the password, which grants them access to the online reservation system. If you're one of the lucky ones, you'll be greeted by chef Hobin Kim's swanky bar snacks—hand rolls, sashimi plates, and kamameshi rice pots. You'll also find inventive cocktails like the Kira Kira, made with bourbon, Fernet-Branca, melon liqueur, yuzu, and ginger beer.

Comfort Cooking

Named for the grandmothers of owner Sam Schnoebelen and executive chef Nick Palermo, **Evelyn Rose** *(111 Church St., NW)* pays tribute to American comfort food, elevating the menu with locally sourced ingredients tailored to the season. Think caramelized scallops stewed in glazed apples, rainbow trout topped with mango-pickle vinaigrette, and roasted pumpkin pierogi garnished with fried sage. Or opt for the tasting menu, which highlights the best of the Vienna restaurant's seasonal offerings. As for dessert, the kitchen spins its own ice cream every morning.

Perfect Patties

The first brick-and-mortar location of **Char'd**—a burger joint that began as a Gaithersburg food truck—arrived at Tysons Galleria *(2001 International Dr.)* last summer. This isn't your average shopping-mall burger: Hearty patties made from grass-fed beef are topped with the restaurant's signature Char'd sauce. On the side, opt for crispy fries cooked in duck fat or a hand-spun milkshake.



Fajitas at Ometeo

PHOTOGRAPH BY AN-PHUONG LY

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WHAT'S SELLING



A hub for shopping and dining, these neighboring suburbs also offer a wide range of housing options—with more condos and townhouses in Tysons, more single-family homes in Vienna. Here's a sample of recent transactions.

$318,000

A 692-square-foot condo in Vienna's Park Terrace community with one bedroom, one bathroom, a balcony, and access to an outdoor pool.

$687,000

An updated three-story townhouse in Tysons with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, two half baths, a finished attic, and a front porch.

$925,000

A 1950s ranch-style house in Vienna with four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a fireplace, and spacious yards in front and back.

$1,435,000

An upgraded Colonial in Vienna with four bedrooms, three and a half bathrooms, a screened porch, and a fenced backyard.

$1,916,000

A four-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bathroom house in Vienna with a two-story foyer, two fireplaces, a reading nook, a theater with a projector, a gym, and a fenced backyard with a patio and a pergola.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TERESA CASTRACANE

Kind Dining

Christos and Effie Sarantis, owners of the **Maple Room** in Vienna *(377 Maple Ave. W.)*, have infused their restaurant with the Greek tradition of philoxenia—the practice of making strangers feel like family. But the menu extends beyond the Mediterranean, featuring an upscale selection of dishes inspired by world cuisines: fresh tagliatelle tossed in vegetarian Bolognese sauce, sushi-grade tuna steak served with wasabi aïoli, and New York strip slathered in bone-marrow butter. A $40 prix fixe menu spotlights some of executive chef Jeff Surma's greatest hits.

Texas Meets Tijuana

Long Shot Hospitality, lauded for New Orleans-inspired Dauphine's in DC and the Salt Line oyster bars, launched **Ometeo** *(1640 Capital One Dr.)* in late 2023. Since then, the Tysons kitchen—overseen by Gabe Erales, the first Mexican American winner of *Top Chef*—has brought a seafood spin to Tex-Mex, featuring the likes of fried octopus or lobster tostadas and a snapper ceviche. A rotating lineup of DJs on weekend nights amps up the fun.

Perfect Persian

The menu at the Persian dining room **Joon** *(8045 Leesburg Pike)*, the handiwork of cookbook author Najmieh Batmanglij, has been honored with a spot on *Washingtonian's* 100 Very Best Restaurants list for two years running. Chef Chris Morgan, known for his stint at Maydan, leads the Vienna kitchen, where shareable small plates stand out—rich eggplant spread topped with crispy onions, or a cucumber salad infused with pomegranate and mint. Heartier options include lamb chops with pistachio chermoula and duck-leg khoresh, a traditional Iranian stew.

Grill Goals

James Jang, founder of the Adams Morgan rice-bowl joint Donburi, opened **Ingle Korean Steakhouse** in Tysons *(8369 Leesburg Pike)* at the end of 2022. The swanky Korean BBQ outpost has quickly emerged as another staple on our 100 Very Best list. The kitchen prides itself on serving high-quality meat from American Wagyu farms, as well as chilled buckwheat noodles in beef broth, cod roe on garlic toast, and yuzu cheesecake. The restaurant is opening a U Street offshoot *(1926 14th St., NW)*, targeted for late November.

High Steaks

Chef Victor Albisu, the Taco Bamba and Del Campo founder who made his name as executive chef at DC's old BLT Steak location, is returning to his roots at **Electric Bull** *(176 Maple Ave. W)*. The steakhouse, poised to open in Vienna in early 2026, will celebrate Argentinean parilla culture—the tradition of preparing and sharing grilled meats. The menu will feature a couple of returning hits from Del Campo: housemade chorizos and burnt-onion jam. And the butcher counter will serve up charcuterie and popular South American cuts of beef such as teres major.

Eat Like an Egyptian

A two-time honoree on our 100 Very Best Restaurants list, fast-casual Egyptian eatery **Fava Pot** plans to open a Tysons outpost *(1624 Boro Pl.)* in early January. Owner Dina Daniel prides herself on fostering a welcoming vibe—and her creamy chicken kofta, tender braised lamb shank, and signature falafel exhibit all the care of a home-cooked meal.

The Mall of Rome

The Italian-inspired marketplace **Eataly** *(1911 Chain Bridge Rd.)* appears poised to enter the DC area with an upcoming location at Tysons Corner Center. No word on an opening date, but expect all of the chain's usual fixtures—multiple restaurants, cafes, a grocery section, and a cooking school.



Swinging foam axes at Level99

PHOTOGRAPH BY REAL TOUR INC.

SHOPPING

Smooth Moves

Reality-TV star turned shapewear maven Kim Kardashian has opened a second DC-area location of **Skims,** her popular undergarment-and-loungewear line, in Tysons Corner Center *(1961 Chain Bridge Rd.)*. Fresh off a collaboration with Nike that generated a new line of sport-specific apparel, Skims carries sports bras, leggings, lightweight layering pieces, and more. The store also offers underwear and leisure clothing for men.

Level Up

Doubling as an adult playground and a restaurant, **Level99** brings its version of "eatertainment" to Tysons Corner Center. Spread across 40,000 square feet, the venue immerses players in mental, physical, and skill quests. Teams of two to six can compete in challenges in themed rooms featuring work by local artists, or individuals can get their kicks by navigating a field of swinging foam axes or leaping from a series of hanging ropes ninja-style. The restaurant offers Detroit-style pizza, burgers, BBQ chicken, brews, and more.

Ear Candy

Anna Harman and cofounder Lisa Bubbers launched **Studs** in 2019 after a piercing appointment left Anna wanting a more sophisticated experience. The company opened its Tysons Corner Center location in August, offering needle-only piercing services (no guns) along with a wide selection of earrings (studs included, of course). Their popular sets of "earscape" jewelry give piercing enthusiasts a creative way to accessorize and showcase their style.

Slip-On Styles

Touting their "hands-free" appeal, **Kizik,** in Tysons Corner Center, specializes in slip-on shoes that combine style with comfort. The brand makes an array of footwear, including boots, but is best known for its sneakers, including an eco-friendly line made from recycled plastic bottles. Independent shoe stores carry the brand, but this location is one of Kizik's only standalone stores.



Cherry Lane Gifts & Home

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHERRY LANE GIFTS & HOME

Fancy Frocks

London-based women's retailer **Hobbs** landed in Tysons Corner Center last year, bringing its tailored silhouettes and stylish dresses, sweaters, coats, and other staples favored by celebs like Kate Middleton.



Vie Nguyen

With over $80M in residential sales, I've built my career as a Fairfax native and top-producing agent in Northern Virginia on a foundation of trust, client care, and local expertise. Rooted in Fairfax and deeply connected to Vienna and its surrounding communities, I bring an insider's understanding of the neighborhoods, schools, and lifestyles that make this area so special.

What sets me apart is not only my knowledge of this market, but the relationships I build—grounded in honesty, communication, and a genuine commitment to my clients' goals. Creativity, organization, and foresight allow me to navigate challenges and uncover opportunities others might miss.

Whether preparing a home for the market or guiding a buyer toward the right investment, I'm dedicated to delivering a concierge-level experience that is strategic, seamless, and deeply rewarding from start to finish. Joining SERHANT has further elevated what I can deliver—providing unmatched marketing, global reach, and innovative resources. For me, success isn't measured solely in transactions, but in the lasting impact I make—helping families feel at home, investors achieve profitable results, and ensuring excellence in every detail.

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WASHINGTONIAN

How Tysons Is Reinventing Itself



The Boro

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE BORO TYSONS/SAM KITTNER

WITH THE SILVER LINE'S OPENING in 2014, local leaders embraced the idea of transforming Tysons from a traffic-filled office park to the downtown hub of Fairfax County. By 2050, according to the county's comprehensive plan, the neighborhood will be home to 200,000 jobs and 100,000 residents, a 250-percent increase over the current population.

A key to achieving this? Walkability. Three-quarters of new development has been or will be anchored within a half mile of the region's four Metro stations. Two examples: the Boro, a mixed-use development with shops and high-rise office and apartment buildings, and Scotts Run, another mixed-use development born more than a decade ago. The architecture firm SmithGroup designed the neighborhood's master plan, which in 2023 welcomed the 28-story Heming luxury apartment complex. Merrill St. Leger, a senior principal at SmithGroup, says the goal is "a transit-oriented, walkable, sustainable mixed-use development"—in which a Heming resident might go for a run along one of the new pedestrian and bike trails, grab a coffee at Sunday Morning Bakehouse, and hop onto the Metro to commute, no car necessary.

Tysons' population has grown 50 percent since the county's plan was introduced 15 years ago, aided by more than 7,000 new housing units. Apartments turn over rapidly, with residential occupancy rates around 95 percent. One particular demographic has flocked to the area: seniors. Katie Cristol, CEO of the Tysons Community Alliance, describes "tremendous demand" for condos at retirement communities like the Trillium and the Mather—which boast such luxe amenities as heated indoor pools and outings to cultural spots.

It remains to be seen whether the plan can turn Tysons into an urban paradise. But the development has created new pockets of vitality. "How do we create a sense of liveliness on our streets?" Cristol asks. "A big part of that is walkability."

Among the large selection of outerwear, the smart trench coats stand out for their timeless design. A bonus: Hobbs offers an impressive selection of petite and plus sizes.

Gifts Galore

The name of Sarah Randall's new Vienna boutique, **Cherry Lane Gifts & Home** *(115 Church St., NW)*, is a nod to the family name, Cherry, passed down by her grandmother. You'll find gifts for holidays and special occasions, seasonal novelties, as well as decor to make your living space festive. The shop also stocks Vienna-themed tchotchkes.

THINGS TO DO

Garden Gallivanting

With 95 acres to explore, Vienna's **Meadowlark Botanical Gardens** *(9750 Meadowlark Gardens Ct.)* is a wonderland for nature lovers. Under the care of NOVA Parks since 1980, the grounds feature different gardens with herbs, wildflowers, and bonsai trees, as well as a Korean bell garden and an atrium that can host weddings. Check the events schedule, which includes hikes, kayaking tours, and birding clubs.

Pottery and Cream

The unlikely combo of **Kiln & Custard** *(115 Church St., NE)* was born after a nearby Vienna custard store closed, inspiring pottery purveyor Sarah Selvaraj-D'Souza to offer the sweet treat alongside her ceramics business. Get your hands dirty with paint-your-own pottery or wheel classes, then polish off some fresh custard, made daily. The shop also offers decadent celebration cakes and summer ceramics camps for kids.

Play Time

A former Tysons office space turned 110-seat theater, **1st Stage** *(1524 Spring Hill Rd.)* hosts a handful of productions by leading playwrights and performers each season. Its current slate includes the Pulitzer Prize–winning *Between Riverside and Crazy*, directed by José Carrasquillo, opening in February. It also shines a spotlight on individual artists with its annual Logan Festival of Solo Performance.

Book Nook

Find all the charm of a small-town indie at **Bards Alley Bookshop** in Vienna *(110 Church St., NW)*. A hub for local-author events, book-club meetings, and story time for kids, Bards Alley also offers online ordering for titles not carried in-store and surprise book bundles for readers who want to outsource their search.

Soothing Scalps

No ordinary spa, Vienna's **Redwood K-Wellness** *(110 Pleasant St., NW)* focuses on your head, specializing in rejuvenating treatments billed as a "facial for your scalp." The service includes a gentle cleanse and scalp drying, as well as access to styling tools and hair products intended to revive your locks. Sign up for the membership program or book a single treatment. For those seeking a self-care outing with their friends, Redwood offers private "headspa parties." W





WASHINGTONIAN Retirement Living

Rediscover the beauty in close friendships and community

By Lauren Reisig

Index of Advertising Partners:

Asbury Methodist Village....134
Cornwall Manor....136
Birchwood at Brambleton by Miller & Smith....21
Cogir Senior Living....129
Collington, a Kendal Affiliate....124
Erickson Senior Living....130
FutureCare....128
Ingleside at King Farm....135
Ingleside at Rock Creek....135
Inspīr Embassy Row....126
Kendal at Lexington....136
Monarch by Schell Brothers....5
Strathmore View by Craftmark Homes....131
Westminster at Lake Ridge....136
Woodleigh Chase....135

In 2018, the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships published a study that posed a simple question: How many hours does it take to make a friend?

Venture a guess. Are the ties that bind instant? Are they forged over 24 hours? 100 hours? Longer?

The study concluded that it takes 50 hours of quality time—longer than the average work week—to elevate mere acquaintances to casual friends, and another 40-hour investment for that relationship to graduate to genuine friendship.

Only after more than 200 hours of sincere bonding is it possible to solidify the bonds of a close friendship.

To draw this conclusion, the study examined the friendship patterns among college students, whose social and residential environment largely mirrors that of residents in senior living communities. Both populations live, eat, learn, exercise, and explore together, and both residential environments lower the barriers that hinder most adult friendships: distance, responsibilities, and time.

The luckiest among us forged tight-knit, lasting bonds during our formative years. Residents in senior communities enjoy the rare privilege of rediscovering in the golden years the deep camaraderie and friendship that eludes most after young adulthood.

No two college campuses are identical, and no two communities in the December 2025 Retirement Living Guide are carbon copies.

Some are single-family-living neighborhoods that unite people through shared luxury amenities. Others are independent or assisted-living age-in-place communities in which residents are united by intellectual curiosity.

The common element is the shared value of community and interpersonal connection.

A piece of advice: approach retirement living the way you would go about selecting a college. Set up tours. Meet the residents. Get a sense of the culture. It's the only way to know for sure if this is a place you could feel at home.

Just don't wait too long. Your future friends are probably already waiting for you.

A community with an activist, advocate persona

Drive into the parking lot of Collington, a Kendal Affiliate, and you may notice one Prius after another, the sound of NPR reverberating as residents roll down their windows to greet you.

Tucked away in 126 acres of nature preserve 11 miles outside of DC, Collington is an idealistic life-plan community focused on contribution and engagement.

Collington's genesis is as inclusive and communitarian as the community itself. Located in Prince George's County, Collington was championed by the first African American Bishop in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, sitting on land donated by a Jewish philanthropist, with an ethos inspired by the Quakers.

"We're proud of being inclusive," said Cory Hall, associate director of sales and marketing. "Our residents are difference-makers."

Many of the 375 residents living independently in this 60+ continuum of care community hail from service-oriented backgrounds, namely academia, journalism, and international development and diplomacy. Residents want to challenge each other intellectually. They don't agree on every topic, but they want to keep their minds sharp and to stay politically engaged.

"Collington has a very distinct identity," said Hall. "We know who we are."

A collaborative and reciprocal community

This supportive, engaging environment benefits residents and it encourages team members to thrive. Nearly one-third of the team members have worked at Collington for more than a decade. This consistency fosters stability and forges strong bonds.

To reciprocate the exceptional care they receive, residents started a scholarship program to support the team members' aspirations and dreams. For some, the impact has been life-changing.

"You can imagine the amount of pride of a woman who was a devoted nurse here, and then her residents chose to invest in her future. Well, she goes on to get her doctorate," Hall said with delight. "The day she came back to celebrate was just a really, really cool day."

Wellness is found in community not amenities

Holistic wellness is a cornerstone of Collington. But it is not country-club style wellness. It's a community that engages the intellect, creativity, and generosity of each resident and team member.

Wellness is an introverted professor who finds her voice through the theater program and the formerly unathletic resident who begins their day with pickleball drills or a cardio circuit class. It's the Weed Warriors, a group of residents who work alongside horticulturalists and professional landscapers to maintain the campus.

Wellness is the artist-in-residence partnership with the University of Maryland that promotes concert-level artistic partnerships.

"To see some of these intergenerational collaborations would give you goose bumps," said Hall.

Wellness is finding the love of your life in your golden years.

"We just lost a beloved, stalwart member of our community, and I have been reflecting on how she met her soulmate at Collington," Hall said wistfully. "They were inseparable. When her love celebrated his 100th birthday, there she was, holding his hand."

See for yourself why Collington isn't just a retirement community—it's a movement. Call 301-635-6379 or visit collington.kendal.org to learn more.

Here's to the
Game Changers.

Groundbreakers. Vision Makers. We have them all here. In fact, it is our residents that make living at our Life Plan Community so different—and so special. From our origins to our expanding future—which includes new homes, a growing campus and ever-evolving amenities—ours is a culture that celebrates individuality and connection.

So, here's to the difference makers.



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Ready to be a part of something bigger?
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10450 Lottsford Road, Mitchellville, MD 20721
*Pending Maryland Department of Aging approval

A life enriched by culture, connection, and cutting-edge innovation

Situated in the heart of its historic namesake neighborhood, Inspīr Embassy Row places residents within steps of the nation's capital's prestigious institutions and iconic landmarks, including the Phillips Collection, Anderson House, the Cosmos Club, and the numerous neighboring diplomatic residences.

Whether the neighborhood is celebrating the annual Around the World Embassy Tour or marking a random Tuesday in early December, Inspīr Embassy Row captures the cultural vibrancy of DC whatever the season.

Inside the halls of this award-winning architectural gem, every detail of Inspīr Embassy Row has been purposefully designed to support holistic well-being. Elevated dining experiences and a full suite of wellness amenities fuel the mind and body. An AI-augmented fall detection and prevention system and future-ready care services enhance resident safety and provide families with added peace of mind.

"Inspīr Embassy Row represents the perfect blend of legacy and innovation, where thoughtful design and compassionate care create an environment that empowers our residents to live fully and well," said Shane Herlet, Co-CEO of Maplewood Senior Living and Inspīr.

Empowering residents living with neurological diseases

Meaningful experiences are central to daily life at Inspīr Embassy Row. Residents facing cognitive decline benefit from structured programming and enhanced clinical staffing, ensuring each resident receives the precise level of support they require as needs and abilities evolve.

"Our goal is simple. Help residents continue to do what they love, while discovering new passions along the way—all while providing an exceptional level of care and experience," said Amanda Glendinning, General Manager at Inspīr Embassy Row.

Inspīr Embassy Row serves as a hub for expert-driven programs, health-focused events, and meaningful partnerships that go beyond traditional senior living offerings.

In recognition of the growing prevalence of Parkinson's and similar neurological conditions, Inspīr Embassy Row hosts the Mind & Movement Collective, a monthly series designed to provide education, support, and empowerment for those affected by Parkinson's disease.

In collaboration with the Parkinson's Foundation and the Parkinson Foundation of the National Capital Area, Inspīr Embassy Row fosters a space for learning and connection. From sessions focused on navigating diet and swallowing challenges to an on-site exercise program for individuals living with Parkinson's disease, Inspīr Embassy Row reinforces its role as a trusted resource and a true center for holistic wellness, purposeful living, and lifelong growth.

A new chapter explores connection and storytelling

Last fall, Inspīr Embassy Row kicked off The Legacy Project, a groundbreaking intergenerational initiative that connects students from George Washington University with its residents. The collaboration is designed to foster dialogue, document life stories, and build meaningful relationships, culminating in the creation of a keepsake book to preserve resident stories for generations to come.

These deeply meaningful conversations explore the promise of youth and the wisdom of experience. In an era when interpersonal differences often fuel division and erode unity, it's beautiful to witness The Legacy Project bridge generational, cultural, and cognitive divides.

"This is such an incredible partnership we are proud to be a part of. Seeing the smiles on both residents' and students' faces shows just how meaningful these stories are, and the impact words and connections can have," shared Glendinning. "It's a powerful reminder of the wisdom and resilience within our community."

Inspīr Embassy Row is welcoming residents in assisted living and memory care. Call 202-293-2100 or visit inspirseniorliving.com to schedule your personal tour.

Leading the way in rehabilitation and community wellness

FutureCare has earned a stellar reputation over its decades-long history as a pillar of the Maryland healthcare landscape. Its rehabilitation facilities are respected by medical professionals, valued by staff, and cherished by patients.

"Our culture is one of always doing what's right for the patient, being active in the communities we are part of, and empowering our team members to be the best that they can be," said Diane Vernon, Vice President of Business Development for FutureCare Health and Management.

A leader in orthopedic, cardiac, pulmonary, and stroke rehabilitation; a vital contributor to Maryland's economy; and an award-winning employer, FutureCare is more than its cutting-edge services. The company supports food drives, promotes youth initiatives, and champions neighborhood causes.

Earlier this fall, Governor Wes Moore joined fellow political leaders and community members at the ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the grand opening of FutureCare Annapolis, the company's sixteenth location in the region.

The community shows up for FutureCare because FutureCare is deeply committed not only to the health of its patients, but to the well-being of all those in its orbit.

40 years of cutting-edge rehabilitation therapies

In 2026, FutureCare will mark 40 years as a family-owned and -operated leader in pioneering rehabilitation services. Its longevity, growth, and all-around popularity are a testament to the company's holistic approach to quality of life. Unsurprisingly, this philosophy has earned FutureCare multiple accolades from U.S. News & World Report and Newsweek.

FutureCare's short-term rehab programs feature occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy. Under the company's VitalStrong umbrella, these comprehensive clinical and rehabilitation services employ progressive technology to help patients fully recuperate from an injury, surgery, or sudden medical event.

A state-wide leader in progressive pulmonary care, FutureCare has the expertise to provide both short-term ventilator-weaning services and long-term ventilator and tracheostomy management.

The newest rehabilitation and wellness center in Annapolis builds on this record of innovation with groundbreaking orthopedic and stroke recovery programs. In addition to VitalStrong, FutureCare Annapolis features STANDStrong, stroke and brain neurologic health rehabilitation, and WalkStrong, its orthopedic rehabilitation program. To help patients regain strength, balance, and mobility, FutureCare has invested in the same innovative equipment and therapies that are trusted by professional sports teams.

"Throughout our existence we have been helping people recover from injury or illness to reach optimal health and wellness," said Gary Attman, President and CEO of FutureCare. "At FutureCare, we're always looking to the future, and FutureCare Annapolis' full complement of forward-thinking rehab services will bring better, stronger tomorrows for patients and their families."



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At Inspīr Embassy Row, every detail is designed for your comfort, care, and fulfillment. Enjoy a beautifully crafted environment, personalized support, and a vibrant community of engaging residents. Enriched by cultural experiences, wellness programs, and intellectual pursuits, life here blends the energy of downtown with the security of exceptional care. Surrounded by the culture and prestige of Embassy Row, Inspīr is where individuality is honored, connections flourish, and living well is reimagined.

Leasing fast - secure your 2025 rates!

Schedule your private tour today.

www.InspirSeniorLiving.com | 202.293.2100
2100 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008

A care team that lives up to the name

If you (or a loved one) are staring down the road to recovery, having trust in the care team is crucial to healing.

Because FutureCare has one of the highest staffing ratios in Maryland, practitioners are afforded the time to educate patients and families. This ensures that the patient and their support network have a comprehensive understanding of the diagnosis, therapy options, and rehabilitation goals.

"FutureCare consistently delivers the highest quality of care and has some of the best caregivers in the industry," assured Vernon.

Whether the plan is to achieve a complete recovery at home or to improve functional ability in a long-term care setting, care objectives never waiver: improve a patient's overall quality of life and respect their dignity.

Quite simply—to care.

FutureCare's newest location in Annapolis is now open. A complete list of services and locations is available on futurecare.com

The Birchwood at Brambleton community feels like coming home

Birchwood at Brambleton marries luxury, convenience, and camaraderie into a vibrant 55+ community. This suburban haven is perfect for those who want to inject a little more relaxation—and a lot less stress!—into their lives.

The result: a collective joie de vivre that infuses the air in Birchwood.

"From day one, we recognized this community was different in the way they connected with one another," said Marketing Vice President Kim Adams, reflecting on the residents' warm, welcoming, and kind demeanor.

Erica Bell, director of marketing at Miller and Smith, agrees: "Every time I visit Birchwood, I see homeowners out walking their dogs or chatting with neighbors. There's such a genuine sense of pride and connection."

Whether during times of sickness or celebration, Birchwood members support each other. The level of engagement reflects how quickly and deeply neighbors grow to care about one another.

"Many people comment this was the best decision ever to move into the community—they've met more people in the first few months of living in Birchwood than they knew in their old neighborhood of 30 years!" Adams exclaimed.

Right-size without compromise in lavish, low-maintenance brownstones

Located ten minutes from both Dulles Airport and the Ashburn Metro and only two miles from the local town center, Brambleton is centrally located yet removed from DC's chaos and congestion.

Builder Miller & Smith recently announced the release of the remaining Brownstone homesites at Birchwood at Brambleton. This is the final opportunity to own a new home in this vibrant community.

Birchwood Brownstones are exquisitely designed homes outfitted with a private elevator. The waterfall kitchen island and leather textural accents are emblematic of the sophisticated style and modern finishes. The available floor plans feature 3 bedrooms/3.5 baths and open-concept layouts, making it an ideal space to entertain friends and host family.

Outside the front door, enjoy access to miles of hiking trails and resort-style amenities. The award-winning clubhouse provides everything residents need to stay physically active and socially engaged.

It's no surprise that these central hubs feature customary gathering spaces and fitness centers. But they also boast amenities you won't see in most other senior communities: indoor and outdoor pools and bars, a golf simulator, a demonstration kitchen, and pickleball and bocce courts, to name a few.

The Brownstones are turnkey houses, and Brambleton is a turnkey community.

"Residents can step right into a community that feels established, welcoming, and ready for them to call home," said Bell.

To schedule an appointment to tour the Brownstone model by Miller & Smith, visit millerandsmith.com or call Eric Hansen at 571-835-4422.

Cogir communities are designed to embrace joy

Washingtonians continue to trust Cogir Senior Living communities because Cogir's commitment to excellence goes beyond basic support. The entire Cogir team, from corporate leadership to the beloved Pawsitive Health therapy animals, is steadfastly dedicated to kindness, companionship, and creative engagement.

Cogir operates several communities in the DC area. In the heart of Alexandria, Cogir of Old Town captures the timeless elegance and urban walkability of its historic neighborhood. On the other side of Alexandria, Cogir of West End blends vintage charm with modern amenities while Cogir of Alexandria Fillmore offers trusted, flexible care in a beautiful setting complete with a rooftop bar and lounge that boasts spectacular views. Across the river in



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FutureCare Capital Region
1051 Brightseat Rd. • Landover • 240-487-4400



FutureCare Pineview
9106 Pineview Ln. • Clinton • 301-856-2930

Maryland, Cogir of Potomac blends sophistication and warmth with its spacious residences and wellness-centered design.

Each location is unique, yet all are imbued with a creative spirit that fills the communities with joy at every level of care.

Cogir communities offer flexible care plans and a boutique approach that feels deeply personal. When one partner needs extra support, Cogir tailors care plans that allow couples to enjoy the proper balance of support and independence together in the community they love.

Each day is vibrant and full of endless possibilities

Cogir understands that a true age-in-place destination should not only be focused on the safety and security of the future, but it should also be a community built on foundational values that empower residents to nourish their mind, body, and soul every day.

"At Cogir, caring for everyone is our purpose and our passion. We believe in a culture of positivity—one that inspires both residents and staff to live fully, connect deeply, and thrive together," shared the Cogir Senior Living leadership team.

Life in a Cogir community is enriching and effortless. Their carefully curated blend of programs is designed to awaken joy and meaning in life, ensuring that every day is different and full of possibility.

Where else in the world can you embark on a virtual voyage to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world in the morning, enjoy an outing to the nation's capital in the afternoon, and reconvene with neighbors that evening to swap stories over a chef-prepared meal?

At Cogir, days begin with warm smiles and fresh coffee to be enjoyed among friends. From there, new adventures await.

Visit cogirusa.com to learn more about Cogir Senior Living.

For tours or additional information, contact:

Cogir of Alexandria Fillmore
571-586-2876

Cogir of West End Alexandria
571-520-7085

Cogir of Old Town Alexandria
571-202-6771

Cogir of Potomac
301-479-5601



Our Alexandria, VA Communities:

Cogir of Old Town Alexandria
Assisted Living & Memory Care
400 North Washington Street Alexandria, VA 22314
CogirOfOldTown.com
(571) 202-6771

Cogir of West End Alexandria
Assisted Living & Memory Care
5550 Cardinal Place, Alexandria, VA 22304
CogirOfWestEnd.com
(571) 520-7085

Cogir of Alexandria Fillmore
Assisted Living
5100 Fillmore Ave Alexandria, VA 22311
CogirOfAlexandria.com
(571) 586-2876

Pet Friendly

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Learn More about Cogir
CogirUSA.com

Vibrant senior living at an Erickson Senior Living Community

There's a reason Erickson Senior Living is a trusted leader in senior communities. In fact, there are many. From expertly designed floor plans to a conscientious financial model, Erickson Senior Living communities deliver an exceptional, resident-driven experience.

Seniors looking to stay in the DC Metro area for retirement have four conveniently located Erickson Senior Living-managed communities from which to choose: Ashby Ponds in Ashburn, Virginia; Greenspring in Springfield, Virginia; Woodleigh Chase in Fairfax, Virginia; and Riderwood in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Ashby Ponds and Woodleigh Chase have one- and two-bedroom residences, while Greenspring and Riderwood offer a studio option in addition to their one- and two-bedroom floor plans. As continuing care communities, assisted living, memory care, and nursing care are available right on campus. Woodleigh Chase's master plan includes a future continuing care neighborhood on-site.

No matter which Erickson Senior Living community you decide to call home, you'll enjoy access to a state-of-the-art fitness and aquatics center, multiple dining venues, and abundant spaces for resident-run clubs, classes, and activities.

"There is so much more here than there was at home," said community resident Bill H. "There are meals, activities, plus the security."

The stress-free lifestyle you've earned

When not out and about enjoying the community's amenities and services, you will have a beautiful residence to call home.

"We checked other places out and, for the cost and all that the community offered, this was the best value for the money," said community residents John and Dawn S.

No more worrying about piles of bills. With the monthly service package, day-to-day expenses are streamlined into a single, monthly bill. That means one check covers everything from utilities to standard maintenance in and around your home.

If a senior community sounds appealing but the thought of downsizing feels too overwhelming, Erickson Senior Living makes it manageable with a comprehensive program that helps with every aspect of the move, from organizing to connecting you with a realtor.

To discover which Erickson Senior Living-managed community is right for you, visit EricksonSeniorLiving.com or call 1-844-689-5007.



Everything You Need for a Vibrant Retirement

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Erickson SENIOR LIVING®

ASHBY PONDS Ashburn, VA
GREENSPRING Springfield, VA
RIDERWOOD Silver Spring, MD

964563_W

Luxury is in the details at Strathmore View

Retirement living is often viewed as a trade-off. On the one hand, relocating to a practical, age-in-place community brings peace of mind. On the other hand, the move can mean losing the convenience and independence of single-family living.

Craftmark Homes challenges the idea that this is an either-or proposition. Their latest community, Strathmore View, proves that you can have it all: location, luxury, and safe multi-level living.

A beloved family-owned business, Craftmark Homes has been a fixture of the local community for 35 years. Their homes are contemporary, but their attention to detail is vintage.

The luxury goes beyond gourmet kitchens, spa-inspired baths, and high-end finishes. Craftmark Homes' designers devote the same level of attention to the 5 ¼ inch eased edge base molding and soft-close maple kitchen drawers as they do the multiple Wi-Fi access points and raised height vanities in the bathrooms.

"The greatest thing when downsizing to a Craftmark home is not having to downgrade quality and luxury," remarked Eric Yakuchev, sales manager and point of contact for Strathmore View.

Live independently without compromise

There is no crystal ball to tell you when it's time to move. But with limited opportunity in Strathmore View, Craftmark Homes is making an excellent case for the right moment to be right now.

Located in the heart of North Bethesda, Strathmore View's optional elevator transforms this luxury, city-style home into an age-in-place oasis.

With ample space to house extended family or host guests, the flexible layouts offer up to 5 bedrooms and 5,600 square feet of interior and exterior living space. The elevator provides seamless access to every level, including a cozy rooftop terrace.

Mere minutes from I-270, the Beltway, and Metro's Red Line, Strathmore provides quick access to the entire DC Metro area. Better yet, the neighborhood's proximity to Strathmore Music Center, Pike & Rose, and Downtown Bethesda means you don't have to endure DC's torturous traffic to enjoy local cultural and culinary delights.

"Close-in premier single-family living locations are very rare to come by," said Yakuchev. "There is only so much buildable land available in such a prime location. Once it is gone, it is gone."

To secure your future home at Strathmore View, visit craftmarkhomes.com/communities/strathmore-view or call 703-989-666.



Happiness is the foundation on which Schell Brothers is built

When Chris Schell founded Schell Brothers, he did so "with the sole intent of creating a company that put the happiness of its employees and customers above all else." Delaware is the ideal place to see that dream come to fruition.

If you're already retired, chances are you know someone who raves about their decision to partially or fully retire to Delaware.

"Delaware is a laid-back lifestyle where you can relax and truly enjoy our local culture. We have great beaches, shopping, fantastic coastal dining, James Beard chefs, and awesome downtowns," said Alyssa Titus, director of marketing at Schell Brothers.

Plus, the favorable tax rates— zero sales tax, low property taxes, and no social security tax—make it even easier to enjoy a low-stress retirement.

A personalized design creates a tailor-made look

Schell Brothers' mission of happiness translates to exceptional customer support throughout the homebuilding process. It's no surprise that ProBuilder awarded Schell its Builder of the Year award, the highest honor for a new home builder.

Across every development, Schell designs provide abundant natural light, choices for exceptional outdoor living spaces, and unmatched curb appeal. Behind the walls, its patented Schellter Technology lets homeowners breathe easy knowing that the systems in their home have unparalleled durability and create a healthy, energy efficient living environment.

As for the design, "Your home can really be what you want it to be, which is something really special with our brand and not typical of a production," said Titus.

Schell design consultants walk you through dozens of architectural choices, numerous floor plans, and countless design choices to create a home that feels uniquely yours. During construction, managers track progress in Schell's proprietary platform, Heartbeat, and call you every Friday to discuss updates.

Does that sound overwhelming? Start with one of Schell's—and Titus'—fan-favorite designs: Kingfisher.

"Kingfisher is a great house for retirees, because you can personalize it and create a really cool living space for your adult kids while preserving your own retreat on the first floor," said Titus.

New locations for the next adventure

Delaware living transcends summers at the beach. Coastal Delaware's year-round vibrancy is one of the many reasons this location remains popular among homebuyers who are looking for a second home or forever retirement home.

Most Schell Brothers' Delaware properties are conveniently located minutes off the coast and an easy drive from DC. But 2026 brings expansion. North of the Delaware beaches en route to Wilmington and Philadelphia is the new Monarch development. Back down south by the Maryland-Delaware border, the waterfront community of Channel Pointe boasts 360-degree views of the bay on Fenwick Island.

Inspired by the Alys Beach community in Florida, Channel Pointe's modern coastal vibe is distinct from any other Schell home. Also unique to Channel Pointe are exclusive floor plans and vertical elevations that complement the coastal topography.

Channel Pointe has the views, and Monarch has the amenities. Titus could hardly contain her excitement as she ran through the list; an outdoor resort-style pool and lounge area, indoor and outdoor pickleball courts, tennis courts, and a three-mile walking trail.

"With no shortage of high-end amenities that foster a social and active community, our communities quickly become families," said Titus. "When you meet our homeowners, they always say that not only do they love their new home, but thanks to Schell Brothers, they have met lifelong friends."

Visit Monarch in June 2026 for a parade of homes or take a virtual tour now at schellbrothers.com. For more information, call 302-569-9698.

For 2026
Retirement Living
Advertising Information

Contact Anna Williams
202-862-3521 | awilliams@washingtonian.com

WASHINGTONIAN



RETIREMENT LIVING PROFILES

The following profiles feature the region's leading retirement communities. With modern amenities that range from independent living to higher levels of care; these profiles focus on wellness and a gratifying life after retirement.





Award-Winning Senior Living in Gaithersburg, MD

Rise above the ordinary at Asbury Methodist Village, where vibrant living, connection, and well-being come together on 134 acres of natural beauty. Our certified arboretum and 17-acre Wildlife Preserve create a scenic setting for an active lifestyle filled with possibilities.

ASBURY METHODIST VILLAGE

Asbury Methodist Village
301-453-8101
201 Russell Ave, Gaithersburg, MD 20877
AsburyMethodistVillage.org

HIGHLIGHTS

"I was not ready to move; my wife was. I was wrong; she was right! Asbury exceeds all my expectations."
- Maynard Mack

Choose from six distinctive apartment neighborhoods, spacious brick villas, or Arts and Crafts–inspired Courtyard Homes—all designed for comfort, style, and convenience. Free yourself from home maintenance and embrace a lifestyle rich in choice, friendship, and growth.

Experience lifelong learning through lectures, cultural events, and resident-led clubs. Stay active in the wellness center and indoor pool, explore the Kinnections Brain Health program, or enjoy activities like pickleball, bocce, yoga, and climbing. Savor chef-prepared dining at our full-service restaurants and cafés and enjoy a full calendar of arts and social gatherings.

Asbury Methodist Village is proud to be recognized as a 2025 U.S. News & World Report Best Senior Living Community for both Assisted Living and Independent Living — and as one of North America's Top 5 Senior Living Communities in the 2025 ICAA NuStep Best in Wellness Awards! Our Well-being Director, Belinda Degboe, was also named a Top Wellness Director for her outstanding leadership and dedication to resident well-being.

ASBURY Methodist Village
Anticipate More

As a SAGECare Platinum Certified community, we celebrate diversity while offering trusted on-site health services, including the 5-star-rated Wilson Health Care Center, rehabilitation, and primary care through Holy Cross Health Partners.

Discover a well-being destination where you can move better, feel better, connect more, and experience more. **Visit AsburyMethodistVillage.org or call 301-453-8101 to schedule your tour.**



WOODLEIGH CHASE

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Fairfax, VA 22302
1-888-518-9619
WoodleighChase.com

HIGHLIGHTS

- *State-of-the-art clubhouse*
- *On-site restaurants*
- *Full-time maintenance*
- *On-site medical care*
- *Pool and fitness center*
- *Stylish residences*

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HIGHLIGHTS

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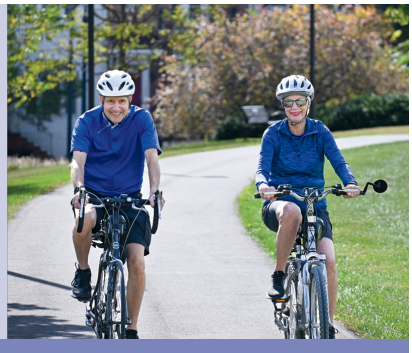

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HIGHLIGHTS

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www.wlrva.org

HIGHLIGHTS

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HIGHLIGHTS

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HIGHLIGHTS

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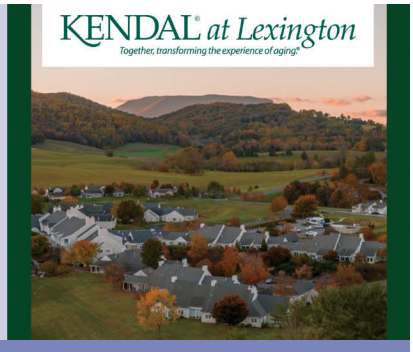

KENDAL AT LEXINGTON

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TRUST FOR THE NATIONAL MALL CELEBRATING 250



Off the Market!

A peek inside some of Washington's recent high-end residential transactions



MARYLAND

1 **WHERE:** Potomac.
BOUGHT BY: **Borzou K. Biabani,** owner of the Biabani Group, a commercial real-estate investment firm.
LISTED: $3,995,000.
SOLD: $4,000,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 11.
BRAGGING POINTS: Known as Casa de Amor, the 13,450-square-foot Spanish-style estate has five bedrooms, six bathrooms, three half baths, a two-story great room, a 50-foot-long indoor pool, an observation tower with a glass elevator, a motor court with a fountain, and a gazebo.





2 **WHERE:** Chevy Chase.
BOUGHT BY: **Andrew L. Baine,** an engineer at the blockchain infrastructure platform Bison Trails, and **Jennifer G. Baine,** a managing director at the investment firm Golden Seeds.
LISTED: $5,350,000.
SOLD: $4,750,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 33.
BRAGGING POINTS: A renovated century-old Colonial with a four-story addition and five bedrooms, three bathrooms, two half baths, a rec room, a workout room, and a backyard with a deck and a garden wall.

WHERE: Chevy Chase.
SOLD BY: **William F. Magner III,** a commercial real-estate investor, and **Maria J. Magner.**
LISTED: $3,975,000.
SOLD: $3,725,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 60.
BRAGGING POINTS: A 1940s Colonial with five bedrooms, four and a half bathrooms, three fireplaces, a rec room, a flagstone patio, and a grass terrace.

DC

3 **WHERE:** Georgetown.
SOLD BY: **May Gardner Wilson,** a designer at Edith Gregson Interiors, and **Charles K. Wilson II.**
LISTED: $5,000,000.
SOLD: $5,000,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 2.
BRAGGING POINTS: A renovated 1900 Federal-style house with four bedrooms, three and a half bathrooms, a family room with a wet bar and media center, a fitness room, and a carriage house.

WHERE: Dupont Circle.
SOLD BY: **Donald E. Graham,** former publisher of the *Washington Post.*
LISTED: $3,200,000.
SOLD: $3,050,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 58.
BRAGGING POINTS: An 1896 Tudor-style townhouse with four bedrooms, four bathrooms, six fireplaces, and a library.

VIRGINIA

4 **WHERE:** McLean.
BOUGHT BY: **Embassy of the United Arab Emirates.**
LISTED: $29,990,000.
SOLD: $27,508,500.
DAYS ON MARKET: 1.
BRAGGING POINTS: A recently constructed 21,800-square-foot estate on more than five acres with six bedrooms, nine bathrooms, four half baths, seven fireplaces, a home theater, a glass-enclosed wine cellar concealing a safe room, a heated marble pool, a fire-pit lounge, a pool house, and two double-height four-car garages.

WHERE: McLean.
BOUGHT BY: **Allison Anne Haupt,** a pediatrician.
LISTED: $3,280,000.
SOLD: $3,150,000
DAYS ON MARKET: 67.
BRAGGING POINTS: A three-story French-style manor with five bedrooms, four and a half bathrooms, a gym, a saltwater spa, a screened flagstone patio, and a two-level backyard with a treehouse and a 40-foot-long zipline. W

Sales information provided by Bright MLS.



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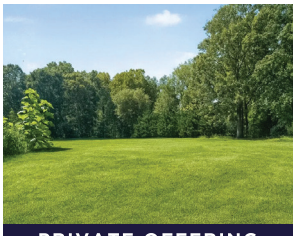

MCLEAN $8,000,000
1008 Pine Hill Rd.
McLean, VA
Piper Yerks 703-963-1363



LANGLEY FOREST $7,496,000
825 Whann Ave.
McLean, VA
Piper Yerks 703-963-1363



MCLEAN $5,399,000
1174 Old Tolson Mill Rd.
McLean, VA
Piper Yerks 703-963-1363



CHEVY CHASE $3,850,000
4209 Bradley Ln.
Chevy Chase, MD
Anne Hatfield Weir 202-255-2490
Heidi Hatfield 202-258-1919



GEORGETOWN $3,795,000
1219 29th St. NW
Washington, DC
Liz D'Angio 202-427-7890
The NTB Group



GTOWN/BURLEITH $2,795,000
3622 S St. NW
Washington, DC
Lenore G. Rubino 202-262-1261



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4649 Garfield St. NW
Washington, DC
Anne Killeen 301-706-0067



BRADLEY HILLS $2,395,000
5102 Manning Dr.
Bethesda, MD
Marsha Schuman 301-943-9731
Betsy Schuman Dodek 301-996-8700



GTOWN/HILLANDALE $2,195,000
3930 Highwood Ct. NW
Washington, DC
Lenore G. Rubino 202-262-1261



WESLEY HEIGHTS $1,995,000
4438 Lowell St. NW
Washington, DC
Margot Wilson 202-549-2100



GEORGETOWN $1,795,000
2524 Q St. NW
Washington, DC
Liz D'Angio 202-427-7890
The NTB Group



RIVER FALLS $1,498,000
7804 Gate Post Way
Potomac, MD
Anne Killeen 301-706-0067



CHEVY CHASE DC $1,395,000
3609 Morrison St. NW
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THE DC RESTRAURANT TRUMP SLUMP



CONTINUED FROM **PAGE 53**

headlines with cheeky cocktails. There were $5 "Moscow Muellers" when someone in the President's orbit was indicted and "Subpoena Coladas" during impeachment hearings. One bar even memorialized January 6 with a series of "Treason All Star" cocktails, including a Marjorie Taylor Greene apple-and-gin drink dubbed "Serious Q: How On Earth Was This Lunatic Elected?"

That was then. In DC today, similar headlines feel more like a punch than a punch line. Politics has become less a sport and more a civil war. Earlier this year, the Green Zone, a Middle Eastern bar in Adams Morgan, changed the name of its longstanding "F--- Trump! Punch" to "F--- This! Punch."

"Things are a lot more serious this time around, and I don't want my staff getting doxxed or, God forbid, physical harm coming to them," owner Chris Hassan Francke says. "I've been pretty defiant of authorities and all that kind of stuff, but the threat has never felt as tangible as it has since January, February."

Restaurants used to avoid politics because they wanted to welcome everyone. These days, there's an added reason: They're afraid of everyone. In an era of With Us or Against Us, seemingly innocuous gestures can invite trouble. Brookland pizzeria Menomale found itself at the center of a political maelstrom and boycott threats after owner Mariya Rusciano—who says she's a registered Democrat—congratulated Trump on his 2024 election win and, more recently, tweeted that it would be a "privilege" to welcome the President.

"I'm sure we're losing some business because of what we said," Rusciano says. "But in this case, I feel like the position of civility and the importance of civility is more important."

Meanwhile, protesters with megaphones regularly appear outside Butterworth's, which has embraced its reputation as a place where the MAGA crowd is welcome. Someone has decorated the surrounding neighborhood with stickers reading FASCISTS EAT AT BUTTERWORTH'S. Following the assassination of Charlie Kirk, the restaurant ramped up security. "It seems pretty clear that people who got their politics from Reddit will pretty happily shoot you over things they don't understand," chef and partner Bart Hutchins posted on Instagram at the time.

Few restaurants would actually turn away Trump or his top brass, in part because it's illegal in the District to discriminate based on political affiliation. Still, simply complying with the law—and the longtime Switzerland-like norms of the hospitality industry—can provoke public ire, especially if you post about it. In September, Good Company Doughnuts & Cafe experienced a surge of social-media vitriol for posting a photo on Instagram of White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt celebrating her 28th birthday with their sweet treats. "Yes, we cater… even to the White House!" the doughnut shop wrote.

Good Company owners and siblings Charles Kachadoorian and Kate Murphy say they didn't even know someone was bringing their doughnuts to the White House until a customer sent them the photo after the fact. They saw it as an accomplishment for their team, regardless of who sits in the Oval Office. Nevertheless, public response to their post was so negative that Good Company took it down hours later. Even after that, screenshots continued to circulate, amassing hundreds of comments on Reddit and Instagram. Read one particularly nasty direct message: "I hope your f---ing business goes to bankruptcy you f---ing pedophile supporting c---."

Trying to navigate a no-win situation, Kachadoorian and Murphy say they made a "mistake" posting the photo in the first place. "We don't want people to feel threatened or unsupported," Murphy says. "That's why we took it down. It's our fault. We take ownership of it. Hopefully, we're not blaming people for getting upset about it, either. They got upset. We understand."

★ ★ ★

"THINGS PROBABLY AREN'T GOING TO GET BETTER"

CAN LOCAL DINING REBOUND FROM ITS slump? A pessimist might note that, according to the Restaurant Association Metropolitan Washington, the city is on track for a record number of restaurant closures this year. An optimist might counter that restaurant openings are still outpacing closures. But given that it can take years for an establishment to go from concept to opening, the full impact of what's happening today may not be felt for years to come. The MAGA policies hurting business—such as cracking down on immigration—look less like short-term detours than long-term roadblocks. Vibes-wise, the restaurant scene tends to mirror the city's mood, and its current doldrums may be hard to shake.

> "I don't want my staff getting doxxed or, God forbid, physical harm coming to them."

Early indicators are ominous. One bar owner says he was in talks with a landlord to sign a lease for a downtown space he'd loved for years. "I'm backing out," he says. "I don't feel comfortable opening another bar in DC right now. I don't know what the city is going to look like a year from now, you know? I don't trust that [Trump] is not going to unleash more military on our streets and make things more difficult for everybody here." The owner adds that he's already struggling to find workers for another project nearing completion: "I have basically one dude coming into work with me now because we can't find anyone else to come in to do tile work or help with woodworking or labor. No one's coming to take these jobs that are just vanishing. People are vanishing. They're just taken off the streets."

Another restaurant owner worries about how all the high-profile MAGA talk of DC being an unsafe city and the images of troops in fatigues might create a lasting image problem for the city, turning off tourists and conventions for years to come. The early Trump years, he says, were good ones for the local restaurant industry, at least until the pandemic. Now, he adds, "the entrepreneurial spirit is not what it was. I have a couple concepts that I would love to do in DC. But for me to go to investors right now or to go to my partners and be like, 'Hey, we should invest in this,' it's really difficult. Because things probably aren't going to get better for at least three years. And chances are they're going to get worse." W

Food editor Jessica Sidman can be reached at jsidman@washingtonian.com.

PBS Journalist Ali Rogin on Growing Up in a Rock-and-Roll Family

Her father is Springsteen's drummer and Conan's former bandleader—and even she belts one now and then



JERSEY GIRL: Rogin with her dad at a "Max Weinberg's Jukebox" show at the Barns at Wolf Trap in 2018.

THIS PAST SUMMER, *PBS NEWS WEEKEND* CORRESPONDENT Ali Rogin took her three-year-old daughter to visit the girl's grandfather at work. His office is somewhat noisy and was a bit of a hike from DC: The trip took them to several cities in Europe where Rogin's dad, Max Weinberg, was playing drums for Bruce Springsteen. It's a job he's held since 1974, in addition to a 17-year stint as Conan O'Brien's bandleader. "We took a beautiful picture of [my daughter] facing the crowd," says Rogin. "She will point to [the photo] and say, 'That's the show. I want to go back to the show.' " Here, Rogin talks about growing up in a rock family and how she ended up in journalism.

"I GREW UP IN A PART OF New Jersey that has a high concentration of rock stars. Bruce Springsteen has a house in the neighborhood. John Bon Jovi—we were neighbors with him. So it does seem like there's something in the water around Monmouth County, New Jersey.

"The E Street Band broke up [for a decade] when I was two years old. My dad got the Conan gig when I was six, and that was as 9 to 5 as a rock-and-roll drummer was about to get. What was wonderful about that was my dad would drive into work like all my other friends' parents. As I got older and became interested in some of the musical guests, my brother and I would go in and visit. I saw Blink-182, my brother saw Slipknot. We were so lucky we were able to have access to that.

"The Conan show was in the studio across the hall from the local news program. I had always known I wanted to do something that incorporated television. We often tell this story in my family about when I was in fourth grade, for a school project, I made a video where I was a news reporter reporting from the Crusades in the Middle Ages. As I got older, I realized that I was gravitating toward news and politics. I got my start as an intern on *NBC Nightly News*. I just fell in love with the pace, the content, the ability to interview newsmakers.

"I sing, I play the piano, I play the accordion, but I always knew that [journalism] is what I wanted to do. The career options for accordionists are a little more limited.

"I did sing with a bar band called Space Otters for quite a while. My brother right now is playing with [the thrash band] Suicidal Tendencies, and I saw them at Northwest Stadium when they were on tour with Metallica. Jay has followed in my dad's footsteps and blazed lots of new trails himself. I like to say I'm the black sheep who has not gone into the family business."

—AS TOLD TO ANDREW BEAUJON

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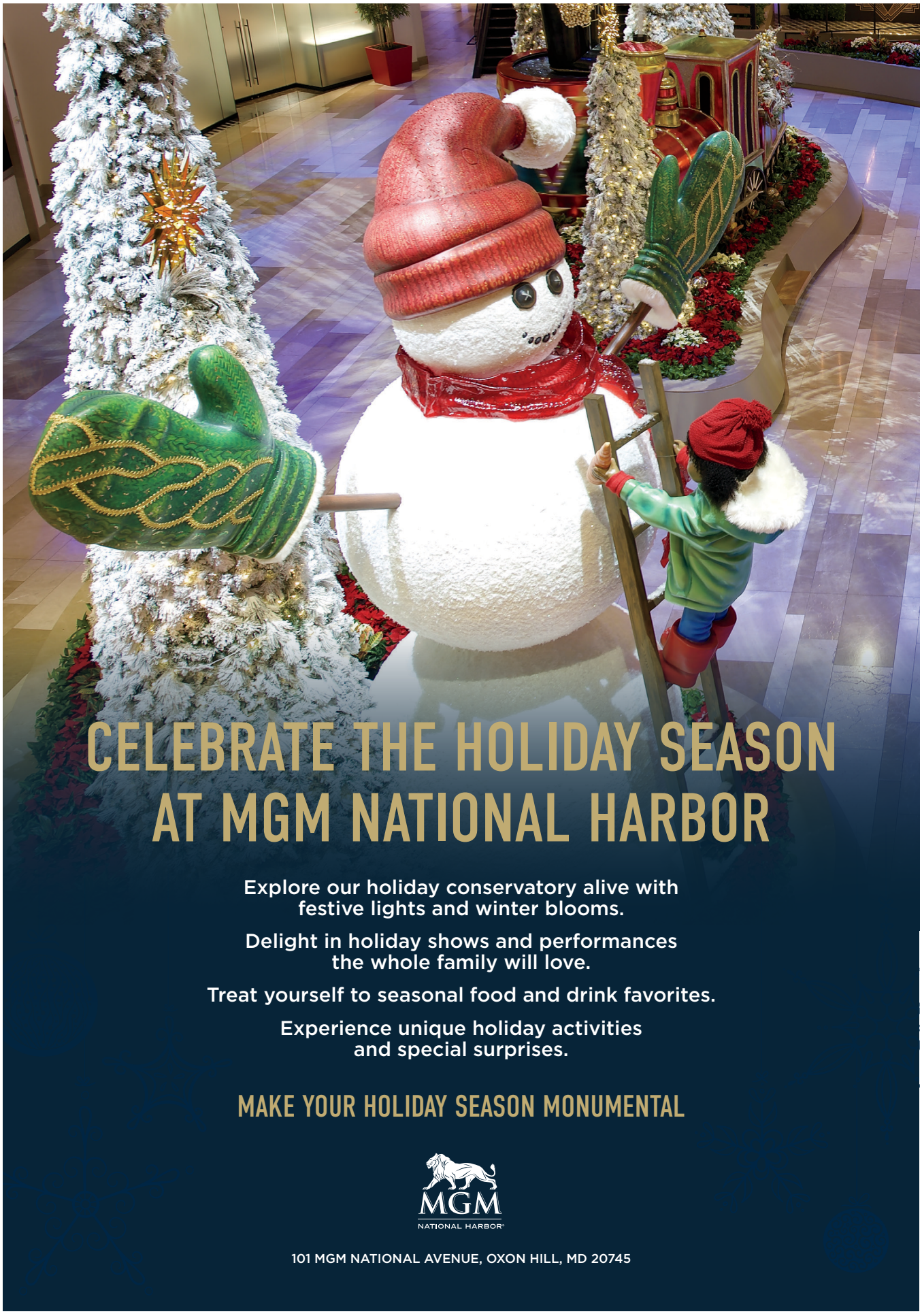

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