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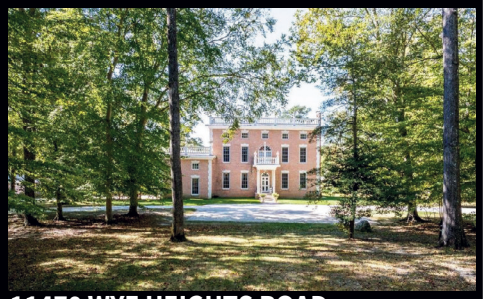
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Tony P has always craved attention—even after his mundane vlogs went viral and he became a target of online scorn.

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Photograph of Tony P by April Greer; wedding by Kir Tuben

On the cover
Photograph by Birch Thomas; food styling by Lisa Cherkasky

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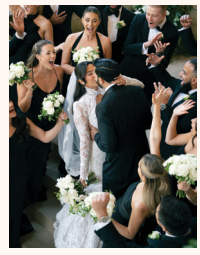
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PHOTOGRAPH OF GAIL SHAW-CLEMONS'S "SHORTHAND REVISITED" COURTESY OF PHILLIPS COLLECTION; OTHERS COURTESY OF CLARK'S ELIOAK FARM AND CORDELIA FISHBAR

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"Peanut-butter swirl at Kohr Brothers in Rehoboth."

"The mint Oreo at Always Ice Cream Co. in Annapolis. It's so creamy and somehow indulgent and refreshing at the same time."

"Mount Desert Island Ice Cream's sea-salt caramel. I grew up ordering this on family trips to Maine and was beyond delighted to learn they have a location in DC."

"Chocolate. The movie *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* helped me fall in love with it."





"Cookie dough! I will dig through all the vanilla to find the cookie-dough chunks, with zero remorse."

"Mocha chip. Has all my favorite things—coffee, chocolate, and ice cream."

"Ben & Jerry's Cherry Garcia. Best of both worlds for when you want fruity and rich."



RIGHT CENTER PHOTOGRAPH BY INSIDECREATIVEHOUSE; OTHERS BY GETTY IMAGES

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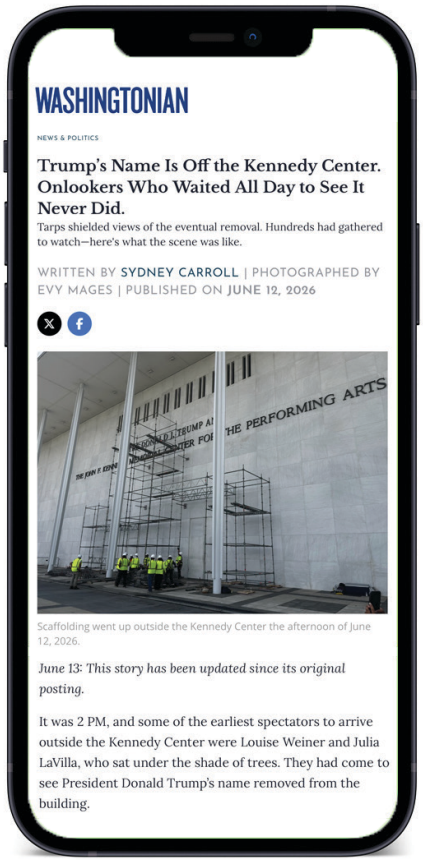


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FEEDBACK



PHOTOGRAPH IN SCREENSHOT BY EVY MAGES

Curtain Call

IT SAYS A LOT ABOUT WASHINGTONIANS' feelings toward President Trump and his takeover of the Kennedy Center that a large crowd gathered to see his name removed from the building after a judge's order. They were disappointed, though: Hours into the watch party, a crew installed a tarp to cover the scaffolding erected to remove the letters. To the onlookers – and many readers of our post about the day (and night) – it looked as if Trump had too much pride to give them the satisfaction. But most commenters on Instagram were still thrilled that the original name was being restored.

"That curtain! Quite the junior-high-principal strategic move." –**@amychimes**

"I know that this is not the most important issue, but it is symbolic and it makes me so happy. To me it says Trump can be held responsible; there are still some judges who are not afraid of him. . . ." –**@judileemorrow**

"Ironic how there was no tarp in place when those disgusting letters were installed. . . ." –**@coachedbyjan**

"Why would you wait around for letters to be removed?!? Laughable waste of time but what else is expected." –**@theanthonyhoward**

"The crowds were so huge... the biggest! Nobody has ever seen crowds like these! They were bigger than both the 45th and 47th inauguration crowds combined!!! Thanks for your attention to this matter." –**@itsmemichaeljames**

"The beginning of the end. Looking forward to the day we can remove his name from buildings and banners across the country." –**@genesee_valley_indivisible**

"Stop talking about him, and giving him airtime, he thinks everything is a show about him... he's right... so don't watch anything." –**@gregorylcochran**

"Sad times where this is the biggest triumph of our country this week. . . ." –**@jynxebinx**

CORRECTION

◆ In the Elite Producers section of July's Top Real Estate Agents, under Teams of More Than 10 Agents, Platinum, the team Advisory, which is affiliated with Compass, was mistakenly listed as Advisory–DC.

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

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not pictured Nicole Gilkeson Stuntz, Of Counsel

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CAPITAL COMMENT



SOAR SUBJECT
Eagles are just one of the things we love to watch on live cams. *For more, turn to page 16.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA DAVIDSON/*WASHINGTON POST* VIA GETTY IMAGES

Meeting Janeese

A few things to know about Janeese Lewis George, DC's next mayor (probably!)

JANEESE LEWIS GEORGE, A LIFELONG WASHINGTONIAN and current Ward 4 DC Council member, recently won the Democratic primary for mayor, pulling off one of the most dominant electoral performances in the city's history. That means she'll almost certainly be the District's next mayor. With the primary now behind her, we called up Lewis George for a getting-to-know-you chat.

Childhood Role Model

"My grandmother, **Mary Lewis.** She was a lunch lady at Alice Deal, my junior high school. She always spoke to me with guidance as if she knew she was preparing me for life. One of the greatest things was when I got to walk across the stage for law school [graduation]. I remember that moment where she said, 'You did it, you did it.' She was like, 'You listened to everything I taught you.' "

Pets

"I have a Cavapoo. His name is Sully. He is very loud and very cuddly. [His name comes from] the British-based crime show [*Top Boy*]. Everybody on my neighborhood block was like, 'Oh, our dog's name is a Disney character, too!' The whole block has Disney characters. Then me and my husband were like, 'Yes, a Disney character . . . not a British crime show.' "



Favorite Ice Cream in DC



"I want to note that Ward 4 has great ice-cream shops across the board. But Everyday Sundae [in Petworth] is my absolute favorite. It's the most community space ever. There's pictures of all the kids all over the walls. I literally went yesterday. The Banana Pudding flavor is to die for."

Something Always in Her Bag

"Baby wipes are with me at all times. It's not even just for my [one-and-a-half-year-old] son—now I realize that baby wipes should just universally be in everybody's bags, because I use them as everything. It's now my makeup wipes, too. They're actually very effective."

Place in DC That's Overrated

"The newly renovated Reflecting Pool."





Lewis George with her grandmother at her graduation from Howard's law school.

Someone She'd Love to Have Dinner With

"I just finished reading *Lovely One* by Justice **Ketanji Brown Jackson.** I'm now, like, obsessed with her. Anybody questioning whether this woman should be on the Supreme Court is crazy because I've never seen someone with a résumé this impressive. So I am a fangirl of Ketanji Brown Jackson, and I would love to have dinner with her and tell her how obsessed I am with her."



Song She Hopes Will Describe Her Mayoral Term

"I am always inspired by **Andra Day's** 'Rise Up.' It is a song that embodies both hope and progress, recognizing the strength of our past and then capitalizing on what our future can feel and look like. 'Rise Up' embodies what I hope people will feel at the end of my first term, which is hope for our future, what we've accomplished, and what we can continue to accomplish when we put people first."

—SYDNEY CARROLL

TOP LEFT AND RIGHT PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF JANEESE FOR DC; ICE CREAM COURTESY OF EVERYDAY SUNDAE; REFLECTING POOL BY EVY MAGES; JACKSON BY KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES

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A Year of the National Guard

August marks a year since President Trump sent National Guard troops onto the streets of DC. How is that going? A look at some stats.



4,632

Number of National Guard troops stationed in the District as of late June. Of those, 584 are from the DC National Guard and 4,048 are from 24 other states and territories.

Nine

Number of months, reportedly, of the previous longest National Guard deployment in a US city (other than natural-disaster situations): In 1968, the guard remained in Wilmington, Delaware, following riots that occurred after the assassination of **Martin Luther King Jr.**

24%

Reduction in "opportunity" crimes experienced in areas with National Guard patrols during the first six months of the DC deployment, according to a study from the Niskanen Center, a nonpartisan think tank.

Zero

Reduction in violent crime in those areas during the same period, according to the same study.

$332 million

Amount spent on the DC deployment in its first seven months, according to a Senate report, more than half of the Metropolitan Police Department's budget for fiscal year 2025. The report found the deployment was on track to spend $602 million in its first year.

2029

Year the Pentagon intends to keep the troops in DC until, US officials told ABC News. They said in March that they expected Secretary of Defense **Pete Hegseth** to sign the order to extend the deployment until the end of Trump's term.

—JENNA LEE

DC CULTURE ROUNDUP

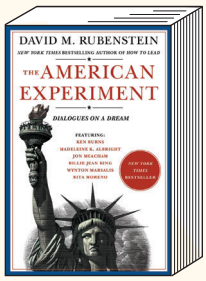
What's new in local music, books, and podcasts



PODCAST

DC Alley Archives

The DC History Center and *Washingtonian* contributor **Briana Thomas** team up for a five-part look at the vital history of the city's alleyways.



BOOK

***The American Experiment* by David M. Rubenstein**

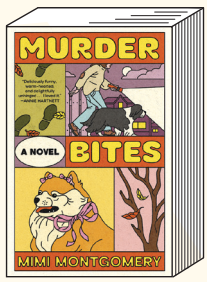
The billionaire owner of the Orioles is also a deft interviewer. Here he discusses democracy, innovation, and other topics with the likes of **Ken Burns, Wynton Marsalis,** and **Henry Louis Gates Jr.**



ALBUMS

Sarah Marie Hughes, *Different Planets* and *Not Me*

On *Different Planets,* the saxophonist teams with bassist **Joe Lally** and drummer **Jerry Busher** for an album of exploratory improvisation. *Not Me,* another new recording, finds Hughes creating unsettling solo sounds.



BOOK

***Murder Bites* by Mimi Montgomery**

This lighthearted mystery—the first novel from an Axios DC reporter (and former *Washingtonian* editor)—is about a woman accused of murdering a dog walker.

PHOTOGRAPH OF NATIONAL GUARD BY EVY MAGES; *DC ALLEY ARCHIVES* COURTESY OF DC HISTORY CENTER; ALBUMS COURTESY OF SARAH MARIE HUGHES

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Schmear Tactic

A bagel shop goes viral for the wrong reason

FOR FATHER'S DAY, BUFFALO & BERGEN owner **Gina Chersevani** decided to create a social-media promotion for her DC bagel shops using ChatGPT. Her husband—the father of her two young girls—died last fall, making this year's holiday a particularly tough one. "I didn't want to post on Father's Day," she says. "It was emotionally draining that day."

Because she was distracted and distraught, Chersevani didn't closely examine the AI-generated image, which included a man holding a bag of bagels with his arm attached backwards and the DC skyline with New York skyscrapers. "One of my regulars came to the store and was like, 'You know you're getting slammed on Reddit right now?' And I'm like, 'What are you talking about?' " Chersevani says. "People went bananas. Attacking me, attacking each other, like I caused all the issues for AI that ever happened." Chersevani promptly deleted the ChatGPT image. "I didn't know it was a hot topic," she says. "I live in a bagel world. I make food all day. I'm in a kitchen. I don't live in social-media land."

The incident is just the latest example of a local business getting caught up in the greater AI debate. In an industry where margins are notoriously thin and staff are overstretched, AI is a tempting and often helpful tool, especially for mom-and-pop operators who have to do their own social media and marketing. At the same time, they're opening themselves up to critics who say they're contributing to environmental harm, not supporting local creatives, or just being lazy and taking shortcuts. "It's not like a virus or a disease, but it is everywhere now," says one local restaurant social-media manager, who uses ChatGPT to produce graphics and posters when he's in a time crunch. (He requested anonymity for fear of the same backlash Chersevani faced.) Still, he says he tries to incorporate original photos within the posts, and sometimes he'll even prompt AI to make the design "less AI." "Everyone wants to turn out good work, original work," he says. "But you're under the budget restraint, under the time constraint, so you do the best you can with what you've got."

Others would rather not touch AI at all. In an industry full of artists and creators, "why on earth would you rely on a robot? For efficiency? That's an excuse," says **Chris Van Jura,** whose Catalyst Hot Dogs business includes two food trailers in Montgomery County.



This AI-generated promotion caused a stir.

But ultimately, Van Jura doesn't think small businesses should be trashed online if they do choose to use AI. "Sometimes you'll take the shortcut. I'm not justifying it in any way. And again, I don't agree with it, but I don't believe they deserve to get roasted for it. I don't think it's fair to hide behind a keyboard and assault that person."

—JESSICA SIDMAN

LENSES ON DC

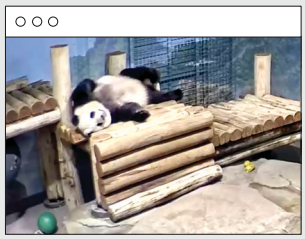
As the deadline approached for President Trump's name to be removed from the Kennedy Center, a live cam captured the (in)action. Soon after, other cameras caught the unfolding situation at the Reflecting Pool. Those were hardly the first notable DC livestreams, though. Here's a look back at some other real-time online broadcasts.

1997

C-SPAN

While C-SPAN has been broadcasting fascinatingly you-are-there live footage from Congress on TV since the 1970s, it launched the first online congressional livestreams in 1997, bringing even greater access.





2001

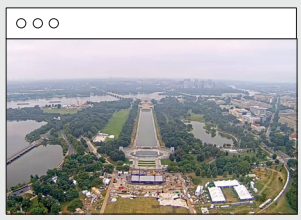
GIANT PANDA CAM

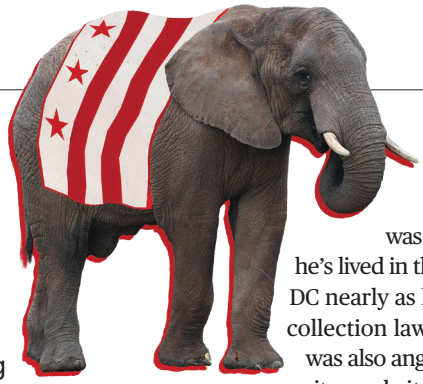
Seeing the pandas in person is a thrill, but if you really want to experience their lives, the National Zoo's livestream gives a richer view. No wonder the project has a ton of fans around the country—many of whom have only ever seen them virtually. The Panda Cams have been so successful that there are now other streams devoted to fun-to-watch zoo creatures like ferrets and naked mole rats.

2014

NATIONAL MALL CAM

A company called EarthCam partnered with the National Park Service to embed a camera atop the Washington Monument. Twelve years later, people around the world can still get a live look from 500 feet above the National Mall.





Red Zone

Who are the Republicans trying to get elected in overwhelmingly blue DC this November?

PHOTOGRAPH OF ELEPHANT IN PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY WAYNE JACKSON

IN A CITY WHERE KAMALA HARRIS GOT 90 percent of the vote, winning a Democratic primary is as good as winning the election. But DC residents do still vote every November, with Democrats often facing unfamiliar names running as Republicans. Who will they be this year, and why run in a place where they have so little chance of victory?

JETT JASPER, DC COUNCIL, WARD 1

This Adams Morgan resident, who works at the conservative Leadership Institute, fell in love with the diversity and friendliness of Adams Morgan when he moved there two years ago but saw issues with crime, litter, and graffiti. "We know it's an uphill battle," Jasper says, "but having a choice, having a different opinion, is important to democracy."

JEFF KIHIEN, DC COUNCIL, WARD 5

Kihien was inspired to seek office by rats. "My ward has a big rat problem," he says. "It was very difficult at night and even in the day to go to my backyard and sit there, because it was full of rats." Born in Peru, he's lived in the US for 27 years and in DC nearly as long, working as a debt-collection lawyer and consultant. He was also angered by how difficult the city made it for him to evict a family who he said was selling drugs from a building he owns. As a council member, Kihien would support a "family wage"—a higher minimum wage that, in his view, would allow a father to be the only working person in a household, "as it used to be 60 years ago."

ABI-ANANIAH PRUDENT, DC COUNCIL CHAIR

"God created me and created all things and is guiding me through life," says the Navy Yard resident. "That's the worldview that I approach all things with." Religion led Prudent—who is from Georgia and moved here about two years ago—to a career with Concerned Women for America, an evangelical antifeminist nonprofit. It also guided her to challenge **Phil Mendelson** for chair of the DC Council. Frustrated with crime, she organized prayer sessions for better DC leadership before deciding to run herself.

JORGE RICE, DC COUNCIL, WARD 6

A longtime Capitol Hill resident, Rice works as a conflict mediator for federal agencies. After a 2024 attempted robbery and assault on the DC streetcar left him with a broken nose, he started to consider running for office. "I decided not to sit behind the computer and complain but rather take action," he says. "I'm not involved in national politics. I just want to focus on local issues and making the city more accountable."

MANUEL RIVERA, DC ATTORNEY GENERAL

"I'm proudly one of the most unconventional Republicans you will meet," says Rivera, an immigration lawyer. A former conservative Democrat, Rivera helped establish the DC law that entitles undocumented people to worker's compensation. He thinks the AG's office could improve its efficiency to save DC money, be more transparent, and better address juvenile crime.

DENISE ROSADO, CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATE

A former attorney for **Brendan Carr's** FCC, Rosado was once a Democrat. Rather than pursue statehood, she wants to make Washingtonians exempt from federal income tax. Rosado also wants to restore the former name of the Commanders and incentivize AI companies to invest in DC. "We need diverse choices," she says. "The 50 years of one-party rule [in DC] has not worked."

—IKE ALLEN



2016

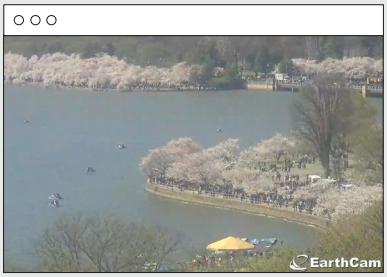
EAGLES' NEST CAMS

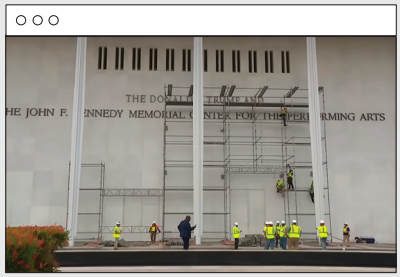
A decade ago, the American Eagle Foundation launched a stream of two bald eagles, "Mr. President" and "The First Lady," as they raised several eaglets at the National Arboretum. That viral cam is no more, but eagle lovers can still view a handful of nests along the Potomac from the National Conservation Training Center's livestreams.

2020

#BLOOMCAM

When that year's National Cherry Blossom Festival was mostly scrapped due to the pandemic, EarthCam set up a stream allowing fans to view the blooms remotely. That has continued ever since, giving viewers from afar access to the famed blossoms.





2026

KENNEDY CENTER AND REFLECTING POOL CAMS

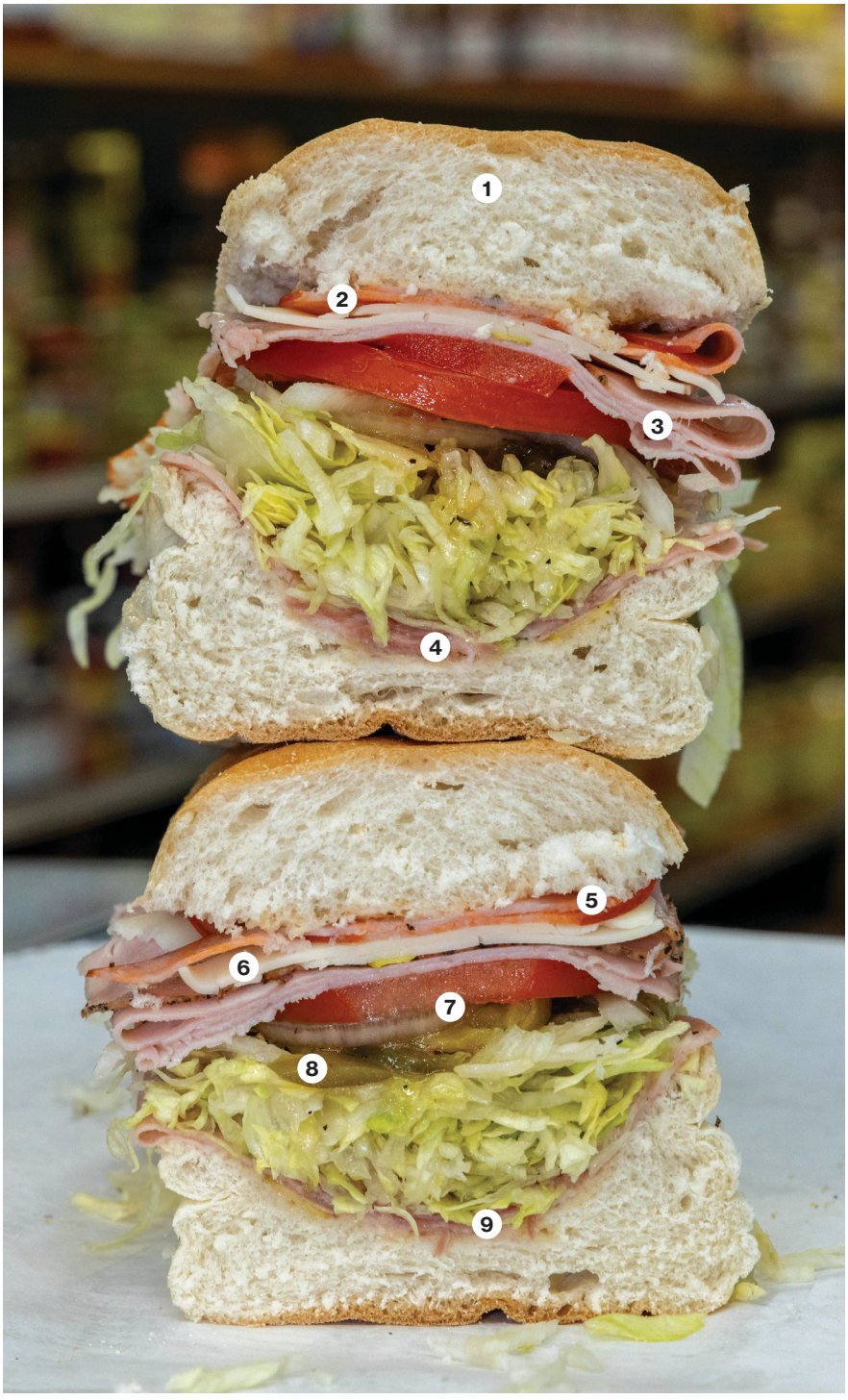
After a judge deemed the Kennedy Center's renaming illegal, a nearby camera started livestreaming the facade for people hoping to see Trump's name removed. Similarly, as the President's Reflecting Pool renovations started to go disastrously wrong, streams popped up to capture the workers and the algae.

—WALKER WHALEN

They're On a Roll

The Italian market A. Litteri is celebrating a century in business. Here's a closer look at its signature sub.

DC LUNCH SPOTS TEND TO COME AND GO, but the Italian shop A. Litteri, near Union Market, is observing a whopper of an anniversary: 100 years. It wasn't always in its current location—founder **Anthony Litteri,** an immigrant from Sicily, moved it there in 1932—and hasn't always served subs, instead functioning as an ingredient wholesaler until the late '80s. But a century is worth celebrating, as are its sandwiches (along with offerings like imported wines and Italian grocery products). We asked current owner **Max Evans** to walk us through how each of their $6.99 Italian Classic subs is made. "You would have a hard time finding a sandwich like this in Italy," he says, "but it is a total classic American Italian staple, especially on the East Coast." —SYDNEY CARROLL



1. Bread

A. Litteri sources its rolls from the Catania Bakery on North Capitol Street—which was also founded by Sicilian immigrants and has been cranking out Italian bread since 1932. Customers can choose a hard roll, a six- or 12-inch soft roll, or a nine-inch wheat roll. Evans's choice? "The purists tend to go for hard rolls."

2. Capicola

Or gabagool, as Tony Soprano would say. This traditional cured-pork product is a flavorful staple of Italian subs.

3. Prosciuttini

Not to be confused with the similar prosciutto, this peppery meat is "a ham with a little bit of spice," says Evans, which balances out the other meats.

4. Mortadella

Detail-oriented cold-cut aficionados will note that the sandwich staple—which originated in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region—has pistachios embedded in it.

5. Genoa Salami

Made with pork and spices, the classic ingredient is "smooth and a little bit garlicky."

6. Provolone

This cheese is traditional—"sharper, tangier, and offers a more flavorful contrast to the meats" than mozzarella.

7. Lettuce, Tomato, and Onion

A sandwich with tired veggies just won't taste right. "We try to use really good-quality stuff. Every meat and cheese and all the veggies are fresh every single day."

8. Hot Peppers

A. Litteri uses pickled jalapeños, or you can sub red cherry peppers or sweet peppers.

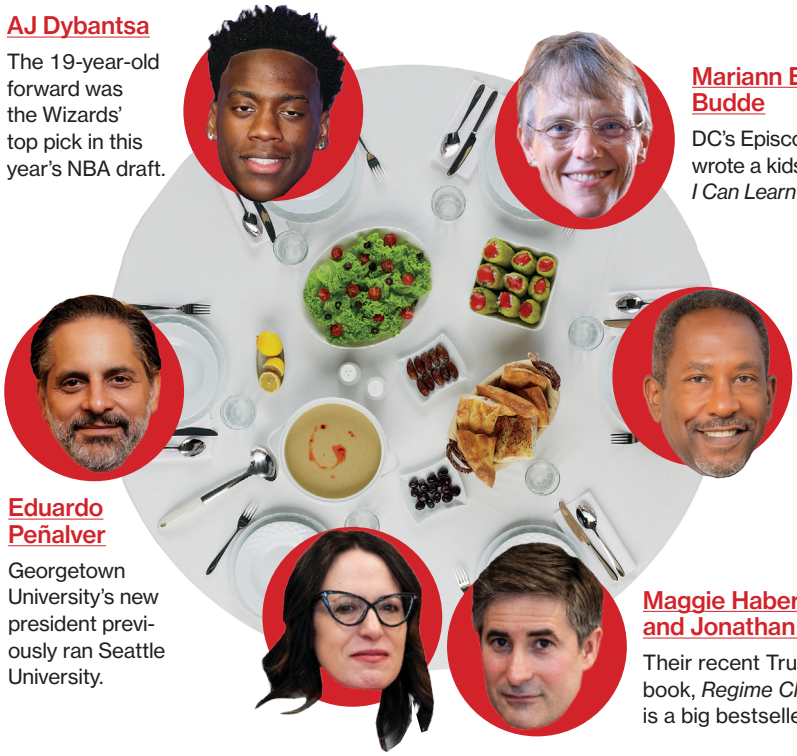
9. Italian Dressing

No bottled stuff here: It's made in-house from oil, vinegar, and herbs. "We use a pastry brush to add it to the bread so there's not too much and the bread won't get soggy."

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVY MAGES

Guest List

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



AJ Dybantsa

The 19-year-old forward was the Wizards' top pick in this year's NBA draft.

Mariann Edgar Budde

DC's Episcopal Bishop wrote a kids' book, *I Can Learn to Be Brave.*

Brent Leggs

He's the new president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Eduardo Peñalver

Georgetown University's new president previously ran Seattle University.

Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan

Their recent Trump book, *Regime Change*, is a big bestseller.

DISINVITED!



Graham Platner

The Maine Senate candidate won't be moving to DC after he dropped out due to a rape accusation (which he denies).

PHOTOGRAPH OF DYBANTSA BY ARTURO HOLMES/GETTY IMAGES; BUDDE BY MAGNUS ARONSON; PEÑALVER BY ELMAN STUDIO; HABERMAN AND SWAN BY DOUG MILLS/*NEW YORK TIMES*; LEGGS BY ALEX SNYDER; PLATNER BY LAURA BRETT/GETTY IMAGES; SOULE COURTESY OF GOELECTRIC DMV

Power Brokers

Switching to electric power can be confusing. A group offers free advice on solar and more.

WHEN BOB SOULE WANTED TO INSTALL an electric heat pump in his home three years ago, seven contractors gave him proposals. Four told him he couldn't do it at all and would have to use gas. One even told him the heat pump would stop working when the temperature dipped below freezing. Soule then did his own research, and he now enjoys winters "quite comfortably" with his new electric heat pump. He's also installed a roof full of solar panels and has managed to run almost everything in his home with electric power. But he had little guidance—he had to figure most of it out for himself.

So Soule decided to cofound GoElectric DMV, a free program that lets people in the area receive coaching from a volunteer about how to electrify their homes. GoElectric DMV can help with basically anything related to electric power: solar energy, heat pumps, induction cooktops, even electric vehicles. It has now helped hundreds of people go electric—a process that's often confusing and requires guidance from companies trying to sell things. In an industry where everyone has a financial stake in the game, from energy companies to contractors, Soule says it's helpful to have someone to guide you who's just a neighbor. "We're not professionals," he says, "but we have a lot of experience with these systems, and we can point people in the right direction and give them the right questions to ask."

Want to enlist GoElectric DMV's services? Just fill out a quick form on the website to let them know what you're interested in and you'll be paired with a coach who has done the same thing in their own home. That's it: just advice from a regular person who's been through the process already. "This is how I practice being a good neighbor," says **Brett Matulis,** a GoElectric DMV volunteer. "There's few, and becoming fewer, places where things are not connected to a transactional relationship. It's nice to step outside of that. We're really just giving friendly advice."



GoElectric DMV's Bob Soule

—SYDNEY CARROLL





Current Events

THIS IDYLLIC SCENE WAS CAPTURED ON the Potomac River just above Fletcher's Cove, where the fisherman rented his boat. The fog tends to burn off early, so if you want to take in this view for yourself, set the alarm. It's worth it for fans of the area's avian offerings: Though the double-crested cormorants seen here are very common, they still make for fun bird-watching as they fly low over the water and dive to hunt underwater.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ASTRID RIECKEN



Dan About Town

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

VIP Global Premiere of "Smithsonian Starstruck" at the National Portrait Gallery

June 10



Emma Shaffer of Fever, the Smithsonian Institution's Ellen Stofan, and Lisa Kewley of the Harvard & Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics

Meta x UFC Freedom 250 Celebration at Ned's Club

June 12



Tammy Haddad of Washington AI Network and Haddad Media with Dana White of Ultimate Fighting Championship



Eric Motley of the National Gallery of Art with Hannah Motley



US special envoy for peace Jared Kushner, Meta's Dina Powell McCormick, Ivanka Trump, and Arabella Kushner

Opening of the National Geographic Museum of Exploration

June 16



Filmmaker and National Geographic Explorer James Cameron with National Geographic Society CEO Jill Tiefenthaler



Washington Commanders defensive end T.J. Maguranyanga and Hannah Powell



National Geographic president of content Courteney Monroe and National Geographic Explorer Bertie Gregory

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL SWARTZ

The Oak Room and Bernadette's Opening Celebration

June 25



Tim Hollingsworth, executive chef of the Oak Room and Bernadette's, with Ten Five Hospitality's Dan Daley



Jacob Trauberman of House speaker emerita Nancy Pelosi's office; Ashley Adionser of *Love Is Blind*; software investor Alex Raines; and *Below Deck* star and real-estate agent Brandon McLaughlin



Musician Caroline Vreeland, Lorenzo Davis of Exiger, and Megan Eberly of Rachel Harrison Communications

44th Annual RAMMYS Awards and Gala at Arena Stage

June 29



Chef of the Year Matt Conroy of Lutèce, Maison Bar à Vins, and Pascual's; Shawn Townsend of RAMW; and Restaurateur of the Year Fernando González of 2Fifty



Andy Brown of Andy's Pizza, Fast Casual Restaurant of the Year, with Content Creators of the Year Tessa Alimahmoodi and Jason Fisher of @DCFoodGod



Casper Rice of Fabio Trabocchi Restaurants with Fiola sommelier Jaryd Spann, whose restaurant won Wine Program of the Year

Radio & Television Correspondents' Association Biennial Dinner at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium

June 30



CNN's Wolf Blitzer and Manu Raju



Kelly O'Donnell and David Bloom of NBC News with Shawna Thomas of MS NOW



Ryan Nobles of NBC News, Allie Pecorin of ABC News, and Nathaniel Reed of Scripps News

FANDUEL × WASHINGTONIAN

THE KICKOFF

WORLD CUP '26

FanDuel and *Washingtonian* hosted a celebration at Barbouzard to kick off the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Attendees enjoyed fresh bites, themed cocktails, and the opportunity to speak with a FanDuel expert to understand how the line is set.

Mixing Maryland kept the energy high as guests participated in World Cup trivia for a chance to win dinner with a *Washingtonian* food critic at one of the magazine's 100 Very Best Restaurants.

Attendees also could pose for photos and select their favorite FIFA World Cup stadium as a custom backdrop.

Thank you to our event partners: **Barbouzard, Washington Talent,** and **Mixing Maryland.**

Photographs by Daniel Swartz



Meredith McPhillips of Business Roundtable and Heather Guay Yoo of Linder Global Events



Deputy assistant US Trade representative Christina Sevilla and Medal of Honor recipient Lieutenant Colonel William Swenson



DC content creator Tony P., Legend Brumbaugh of the Embassy of Qatar, and Barbouzard owner Nasr El Hage



Washingtonian CEO Catherine Merrill (third from left) with FanDuel's Matthew Tremblay, Jonathan Nabavi, Jake Goldman, Cory Fox, and Lindsay Rosen



Arthur Jones of ABC News, content creator Jules McGuire, Natasha Anderson of MBDA, Rhyan Henson of Gray Media, and Latoya Jones show off their FanDuel soccer scarves



Versus team members Vinoda Basnayake, Jimmy Murrill, Nikki Braden, and Jared Nozick



FanDuel's Jonathan Nabavi and Nani Bennett



World Cup–inspired cocktails added a festive touch

19TH ANNUAL ANNC GOLF CLASSIC

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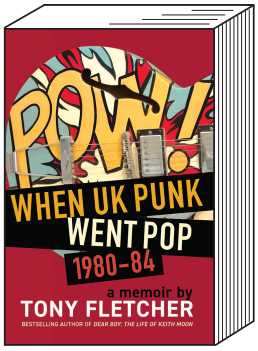
SUPPORT VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

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THINGS TO DO

Our 10 picks for the month in culture

By Pat Padua



BOOKS

TONY FLETCHER

POLITICS AND PROSE (UNION MARKET)
August 27
The biographer of Keith Moon and the Smiths discusses his latest book, *Pow! When UK Punk Went Pop, 1980–84.* In the book (and probably at the event), he tells stories of encounters with British music figures like Paul McCartney and Paul Weller.

MUSIC

MASEGO

THE ANTHEM
August 22
The Jamaican American singer, saxophonist, and producer returns with *Fix Your Face,* his first album since 2023, continuing his blend of jazz-inflected R&B and smooth grooves.





THEATER

THE NOTEBOOK

NATIONAL THEATRE
August 18–30
Nicholas Sparks's bestselling love story arrives as a musical, transforming the tale of enduring romance and memory loss into a three-hanky production.



MUSIC

FOO FIGHTERS

NATIONALS PARK
August 17
Dave Grohl – who grew up in Virginia and got his start in local bands like Dain Bramage and Scream – returns to his hometown in support of *Your Favorite Toy,* Foo Fighters' latest album.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MASEGO COURTESY OF THE ANTHEM; *THE NOTEBOOK* BY ROGER MASTROIANNI; FOO FIGHTERS BY ELIZABETH MIRANDA

MUSIC

ZOH AMBA



PEARL STREET WAREHOUSE

August 1

The free-jazz saxophonist takes an unexpected turn toward acoustic singer-songwriter territory on her latest album, *Eyes Full,* while retaining the adventurous spirit she's known for.

MUSEUMS

"TOMORROW THE SUN WILL RISE"



PHILLIPS COLLECTION

August 1–September 20

Faced with 1,500 submissions, the jury for this exhibition devoted to artists from DC, Maryland, and Virginia had a tough task. The result of those efforts is a collection of multimedia work by 48 artists, some of whose creations are appearing in an exhibit for the first time.

THEATER

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG

SIGNATURE THEATRE

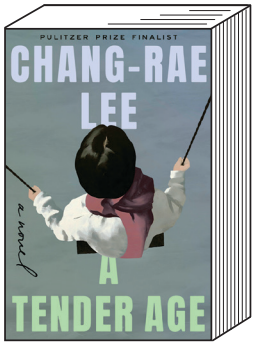
August 25–November 1

This Stephen Sondheim musical – recently revived on Broadway and released as a film of that production – traces the evolving friendship of three show-business collaborators in reverse chronology, charting ambition, success, and the cost of pursuing dreams.



BOOKS

CHANG-RAE LEE



POLITICS AND PROSE (CONNECTICUT AVENUE)

August 13

The acclaimed Korean American novelist's latest, *A Tender Age,* follows an 11-year-old son of immigrants through a transformative summer in a sweeping coming-of-age story.

THEATER

THERAPY GECKO



MIRACLE THEATRE

August 27

Podcaster and comedian Lyle Drescher, clad in his signature reptilian costume, fields questions from audience members while dispensing advice that ranges from thoughtful to delightfully absurd.

MUSIC

THE NSO PERFORMS BEETHOVEN'S NINTH SYMPHONY

WOLF TRAP

August 14

Gianandrea Noseda leads the National Symphony Orchestra in an all-Beethoven program featuring the overture to "The Consecration of the House," the rarely performed "Elegiac Song," and the monumental Ninth. W



PHOTOGRAPH OF AMBA BY ELEONORE HENDRICKS; DRESCHER COURTESY OF UNION STAGE; DIEGO BORGSDORK'S "REWE TAPESTRY" COURTESY OF PHILLIPS COLLECTION; *MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG* COURTESY OF SIGNATURE THEATRE; NSO COURTESY OF WOLF TRAP FOUNDATION

7TH ANNUAL

POLO CLASSIC

September 26, 2026



TRADITION, ACTION, AND COMMUNITY

Premier region-wide event benefiting Habitat Metro Maryland's mission to build affordable homes, communities, and hope across the metropolitan area.

2:00pm-5:30pm

Congressional Polo Club
Poolesville, MD 20837



GET TICKETS

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habitatmm.org
301-990-0014

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IDEAS. ARGUMENTS. REPORTING.



Sweet Talk

Food sociologist Priya Fielding-Singh discusses kids, sugar, and the state of the American diet

By Sylvie McNamara

Photograph by Laura Metzler



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S updated Dietary Guidelines for Americans included an eye-popping recommendation: Children under age 11 should consume no added sugar at all. That would mean no Halloween candy or birthday cake—and probably no ketchup or jarred pasta sauce or sandwich bread, either. Priya Fielding-Singh, a sociologist who's the director of policy and programs at George Washington University's Global Food Institute, understood that the government was recommending something impossible. Americans live in a food environment where the cheapest and most plentiful foods are full of added sugars and relentlessly marketed to children, so she does not believe that limiting a child's sugar consumption can or should fall to parents alone.

That's why the Global Food Institute produced a brief, released in June, that lays out policy proposals for how to reduce children's intake of added sugars. Recommendations include cutting sugar out of school lunches and daycare meals, restricting Big Tobacco–style food marketing to children, and mandating front-of-package sugar labeling to help consumers make healthier choices. I called Fielding-Singh in July to talk about sugar, and also to try to make sense of why the Trump administration has made steep cuts to federal food assistance while insisting that American families should eat better.

How did you get interested in food and the inequities of American eating?
When I was growing up, my family was a foster family, so we took in kids from pretty impoverished backgrounds. I followed my foster siblings over the years, seeing where they ended up, and I became interested in the structural forces that were setting me on one path and my foster siblings on another. It seemed to me that food was a really important part of that, that what we put into our bodies every single day has a tremendous impact on our life chances—our abilities to do things like go to school, get a job, and have a family. So I became interested in food as this mechanism of inequality.

What did you notice about how your foster siblings related to food?
Two of my foster siblings came to us after years of abuse and poverty. We were the first family that they came to after Child Protective Services brought them in, and it was really clear to me that they had been through an extreme experience of food scarcity. One way that manifested was stockpiling and hiding food. My mom would buy these cans of Chef Boyardee, because they were my foster sister's favorite. My mom would fill the cupboards with them—tons and tons of cans—because she knew that the feeling of security was really important to my foster sister, and even still, my foster sister would hide them under the bed.

It was so clear to me that going through food insecurity was a haunting experience that she would never really outrun. She spent a lot of her time preoccupied about where her next meal was coming from and making sure that we had the foods that she liked. I think with that amount of preoccupation, it's hard to focus on other things. Satiety and having enough becomes the orienting goal of your day and your life, and so it's really a privilege to not have that.

In your 2021 book, *How the Other Half Eats,* you explain how junk food can have different emotional resonance to families at different income levels.
I think this is one of the least discussed parts of nutritional inequality. Food takes on this tremendous symbolic meaning for parents who are raising their kids within a context of scarcity or deprivation. Raising a kid in poverty means having to say no all the time—to the big things like vacation, but also to the medium and small things, like a new sweatshirt or a replacement for a shattered phone screen. So one thing that I saw firsthand in my research was how, within a context of having to say no over and over and over again—which was really emotionally distressing for parents—food, and in particular junk food, was one of the few things that parents could say yes to on a pretty much daily basis. It was something that they could almost always afford. I found that lower-income parents were saying yes to these foods not because they were trying to harm their kids' health but as a way to emotionally nourish their kids within an extremely challenging context.

To me, as a sociologist, this is such an important point because we always evaluate these food choices strictly from a nutritional standpoint: How healthy is a bag of Cheetos? What about a Snickers? But my research suggests that we should also be understanding these choices from the perspective of: What are parents giving their kids with these foods? It's not just the food—it's also symbolic.

For those families, the main nutritional concern is often simply getting enough calories, not whether those are "good" calories. But that's gotten harder, given last year's cuts to SNAP. Is cutting out sugar the right priority if kids aren't getting enough to eat?
This is top of mind for me right now. So many of the families that I spent time with relied on federal food assistance simply to get enough calories for their kids. That's why I tend to think about policy levers that would actually change institutional settings where kids are eating—like reducing how much sugar is in the meals kids get at school—rather than asking parents to take individual steps. I believe that in this



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country, we put the burden of a healthy diet too squarely on parents' shoulders and that we would benefit from institutions taking on more of that responsibility.

What exactly happened last year with the SNAP cuts?
The passage of H.R. 1, which you will know as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, actually set in motion the most consequential changes to the federal food safety net since its inception. H.R. 1 reduces federal SNAP funding by an estimated $187 billion over the next decade, which is roughly a 20-percent reduction. Roughly 37 million Americans count on SNAP to meet their basic food needs, and millions of them would lose eligibility.

But what is the policy priority here? It's really important to the MAHA movement to promote healthy, nutritious eating – but the administration is cutting the benefits that allow families to afford those kinds of meals.
Essentially, what we've seen is that the Trump administration has these two distinct food agendas that are in tension with each other. The first agenda is an economic one that's focused on reducing federal spending on food assistance. It's working to shift costs to states and tightening eligibility so that fewer people can access the program. Then there's the second agenda, which is more of a nutrition and public-health one, that's focused on reducing chronic disease and promoting healthy whole foods–but there's a tension between these two goals.

SNAP supports a lot of the outcomes that MAHA cares about. It's linked to lower food insecurity and better diet quality, so cutting off that food assistance for millions of families actually cuts against MAHA's stated goals of improving diet quality and preventing disease. It's really important for people to understand that food security and public health go hand in hand, and it's difficult to achieve one without the other. You can't move the needle on nutrition outcomes if families are hungry.

The Trump administration recommending no added sugar before age 11 is really stark. Is there evidence that this is necessary?
So this was a really big jump. Prior guidelines recommended that children under the age of two completely avoid added sugar, and there's really strong evidence to support that guidance. The American Heart Association recommends zero added sugar under the age of two, and then no more than 25 grams per day–or roughly six teaspoons–for kids age two to 18. The average kid consumes nearly three times that amount, so I think that shows you how far we have to go on added sugar.

But there's a question of whether zero before age 11 is appropriate, and I would say that the evidence base is not there, although directionally, I think it's correct. It accurately reflects that kids are eating way too much added sugar and that we should take steps to reduce that consumption.

What's so bad about kids eating sugar?
The evidence is really striking. Excessive added sugar intake contributes to childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes, as well as increased risks later in life:

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American kids are exceeding recommended levels on all three of the main ingredients that public-health experts consistently flag as issues, which are added sugar, sodium, and saturated fat. What I think distinguishes added sugar is the breadth of its effects. Sodium and saturated fat are best known for their effects on cardiovascular health. Added sugar is linked to a broader range of health concerns, across obesity, diabetes, and liver health. And kids and adults are consuming way more added sugar than they even are aware of. It's just so pervasive across all different food types and categories. It's invisibly woven into so many packaged staples that families, schools, daycares, and sports teams rely on to feed kids.

Cutting out candy or birthday cake to avoid sugar sounds pretty joyless. Do you think that's really necessary?
My perspective is that treats are important. It's really meaningful to be able to give your kid an ice-cream cone in the summer and sit with them and eat it. I do not think that we should try to eliminate treats from kids' lives. But as a parent, I want to get to choose when I treat my kid. What I find frustrating about the current food environment is that my kid is getting filled up with added sugar just eating the normal things that I might not perceive as sugary, so that she's essentially meeting her sugar quota before I've even had a chance to treat her.

To me, this is not about stripping the joy and fun out of raising kids. We're not advocating for getting rid of Halloween, for instance. What I think is important is that the foods you feed your kid that you think are healthy—and that are advertised to you as healthy and low-sugar—should actually be low-sugar foods, so that after you've given your kids some pasta with tomato sauce, you haven't accidentally fed them 11 grams of added sugar. That's why I'm trying to change the food supply and the food environment, rather than demonizing parents who rightfully want to be able to share a piece of cake with their kid. W

Staff writer Sylvie McNamara is at smcnamara@washingtonian.com. This interview has been edited and condensed.







Stepping Out of the Arena

Hana S. Sharif's tumultuous tenure as Arena Stage's artistic director recently came to an end. What actually happened?

By Trey Graham

IN THREE YEARS UNDER THE STEWARD-ship of artistic director Hana S. Sharif, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater burned through five production managers, lost two of three commercial producing partners lined up for one season, and ran deficits that sources say totaled millions of dollars. Preview performances were canceled right and left, leaving patrons irritated. Costumes went unfinished, leaving actors feeling unmoored. The entire set for one tentpole production had to be "shopped out" to a Canadian builder weeks before opening because designs had been finalized so late.

By the time Sharif's resignation letter hit the *New York Times* on June 26, the opening night of the capstone production of Arena's 75th-anniversary season, the theater was, by multiple accounts, in crisis.

In those same three years: Senior staff described their nationally influential artistic director, the first person of color to lead Arena, as "uppity." A board member gave Sharif a gift with the image of a pig on it. Employees observed, out loud, that it would be much easier working for a white man. And when Sharif—a writer-director who counts Adrienne Kennedy and Edward Albee among her mentors in the craft—moved to program a play she'd written, the Arena board told her no.

Both of these sets of observations are true. All of these things happened in the same building, among the same people, over the same span of time. The question this story tries to unpack is not whether Sharif was a solid artistic director or whether she faced ingrained racism and sexism as she tackled a high-profile job. The question is how, with passions

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDA DAVIDSON/*WASHINGTON POST* VIA GETTY IMAGES

running as hot as they apparently were by the spring of 2026, nobody set a match to the Mead Center.

"YOU'RE IN FOR A RIDE" IS THE CAUTION one senior Arena staffer heard from a colleague at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Sharif's artistic home until the Arena board invited her to take the helm. At the time, Arena Stage faced an epochal shift with the departure of longtime artistic director Molly Smith, who'd held the chair for 25 years. It still labored under a $65 million debt load associated with its landmark building on DC's revived Southwest waterfront. And annual structural deficits had persisted for half a decade before Sharif's arrival.

Smith's 2023 retirement coincided with a national movement aimed at diversifying what many called "White American Theater." Many Washington theaters in particular would respond vigorously, but other major institutions took refuge in what has become known as "comfort theater," backing away from confrontation and coddling audiences with familiar fare.

Arena staffers were wary of Sharif personally, especially after what one called an "awful" interview process. But the influential head of the search committee—Catherine Guttman-McCabe, who would ascend to chair the full Arena board after Sharif's hiring—backed her to the hilt.

Like other board members *Washingtonian* contacted for comment, Guttman-McCabe did not respond. Nor did Sharif. And not a single member of Arena's current rank-and-file production or administrative staff would agree to speak on the record when contacted. This article is based on conversations with nearly a dozen current and former staffers who spoke only on condition that their names wouldn't be used.

An established BIPOC actor who worked with both Sharif and previous artistic director Molly Smith did say that "the rule was you can't tell Hana no." Some who did, the actor continued, were fired, denied access to their work product, and escorted out of the building.

Sharif was regularly late to rehearsals, by this performer's account, a claim echoed by other employees across departments with regard to other kinds of meetings. Overriding staff concerns, Sharif insisted on technical choices that put people in danger—choices that, by one firsthand account, resulted in injury to at least one staffer.

These complaints and more have ricocheted around social media since Sharif's resignation, drawing no shortage of affirmative echoes.

"My experience with her was deeply, DEEPLY scarring," wrote DC-area actor Jeremy Keith Hunter in a June 27 Facebook post. "I've never been so humiliated and disrespected in my entire theatrical career, from a decision that she approved and signed off on."

Hunter prefaces his post with a disclaimer: "I'm never happy to see talented people (especially Black women) in authority have to step down or be dismissed." He concludes with the following: "I don't wish her ill, but I can't say I wish her well either."

Other critical voices have come from St. Louis. "I understand well the hardships Black theater folks endure along our paths to success and influence," writes a multidisciplinary artist who appeared in Sharif's staging of *Murder on the Orient Express* at the Rep, in a private message to *Washingtonian*. "That does not excuse the harm any may cause along their way. As a Black actor, working with Hana Sharif was absolutely harrowing. Offstage Hana is cold, mean, combative. I witnessed it. I received it. I'm a grown man and she literally harangued me to the point of tears before a notes session in the theater. [O]n stage she presents [as] nice, charming, refined, intellectual and maybe even 'sharp.' But she's really just calculated, manipulative, and self-serving."

That artist's assessment stands in stark opposition to that of Alexis Kulani Woodard, who was Sharif's assistant director on the recently closed philosophical thriller *The Motion*. Woodard posted warmly about the experience on Facebook. Sharif is "one of the kindest and most generous people I have ever had the pleasure to learn from," Woodard wrote, and a leader committed to a vision encompassing "radical access, artist investment, and making the impossible a reality."

Bigger names in the national theater community have also come roaring to Sharif's defense. Visionary administrator Nataki Garrett, actor-director Ruben Santiago-Hudson, and Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright Paula Vogel are among them.

So is Reggie D. White, who followed Sharif from St. Louis to DC and recently moved on from Arena to take the reins at Woolly Mammoth. White knows leadership transitions can be difficult. "So much of the first period . . . is the institution telling the artistic director how to lead," he says. " 'We do it this way' or 'This works like this.' Which I find challenging, because artistic directors . . . are hired for their vision. They are hired for their expertise. They are hired for their unique perspective."



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Insiders paint a complicated picture of Sharif's three-year run at Arena Stage.

White says he watched "people dismiss suggestions that [Sharif] would make or decide that they didn't need to do what she asked of them because that 'wasn't the way that they worked.' " It's White's recollections that surface the word "uppity," which he says he heard more than once. That special, singularly gendered epithet that rhymes with "itch," too.

He's philosophical enough to know some of that comes with the territory when a new leader takes the chair from an influential figure like Molly Smith. "At that point of a leader's tenure, people are working at that institution because they're choosing that leader," he notes. "When you inherit that staff, no one chooses you."

Legacy staff communicated that fact quite clearly sometimes. "That was a thing I certainly witnessed at Arena," White says. "People testing that line—with respect and with disrespect." His question: "How much dissonance, how much friction, can you exist with?"

For White, one particularly dissonant moment was that gift from a board member, which came adorned with the image of

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRUCE GLIKAS/GETTY IMAGES

Miss Piggy, the legendarily temperamental Muppet diva. Sharif, White points out, is a practicing Muslim who observes Ramadan.

Edgar Dobie, the veteran Arena executive producer responsible for the company's business operations and Sharif's partner in leadership, winces visibly when asked about the Miss Piggy incident. "I did see that gift," he acknowledges, "and thought it a poor choice."

FOR ALL THAT THEY TELL TALES OF Sharif's management style, Arena employees past and present also keep bringing up the role of the institution's board of trustees and the question of whether it shouldn't have intervened sooner. It's not as if the board is unreachable. Senior Arena staffers sit in on trustee meetings. Board members are said to visit the Mead Center regularly, for openings and special events and even during ordinary business hours.

And they kept a close eye on budgets, approving annual structural deficits right up until this year, when they didn't. "This year, in the planning for fiscal year 2027, the mandate from the board was very clear that the budget needed to be neutral," Reggie D. White recalls. "They were not going to approve any deficit spending."

"I understand well the hardships Black theater folk endure along our path to success and influence. That does not excuse the harm any may cause along their way."

Sharif had helped bring in a pile of what's called commercial-enhancement money—cash backing from Broadway and touring producers to develop shows they hope will move from nonprofit theaters to their for-profit ecosystem. (Examples from Arena's history have included the recent hit *Chez Joey;* the Avett Brothers musical, *Swept Away;* and, most famously, the smash *Dear Evan Hansen*.) White's estimate of the haul? $8 million.

With that on her balance sheet, with earned revenue rebounding from $8.5 million to $12 million, and with audiences hyped for the opening of the TLC musical, *CrazySexyCool*, which she'd brought to Arena, Sharif wanted to program *1880,* a play of her own set during Reconstruction. Such a move was explicitly permitted in her employment contract, White says. And the audience projections for Sharif's drama were encouraging. "There was a case made quite clearly for the show to deliver a level of financial success to make



it fit within the board's [budgetary] requirements," White says.

The board said no. Or perhaps it didn't. "I don't think that was ever a decision of the board," Edgar Dobie says. "I think they wanted to review any kind of potential conflicts or anything that may be associated with that, but I don't think they said you can't do it: 'You can't do your play, ever,' you know."

White's clear understanding, by contrast, is that the board did say no, directly or indirectly, and the on-background chatter about *1880* among Sharif's detractors carries a whiff of glee that her ambitions were blocked. That's one of the things sitting heavy on White's shoulders.

Since his mentor's departure, "I've heard a number of people say that they were happy that she finally got put in her place," White says. "I feel like the kind of resentment that must have been [subdued] when she got this job is now being allowed to sound out loud, that it's surfacing.

"It takes time to build a system," White continues. "And it's certainly hard to build a system when a meaningful contingent of the staff just decide wholesale they're not interested in working the way that their leader wants them to work. If Hana [had been] greeted with the kind of grace that she arrived with, there would be a system. There would be a mechanism. This would be a well-oiled machine, but because there was so much resistance . . . ."

He sighs. "I'm just trying to make sure that this fate doesn't befall me" at Woolly Mammoth, he says, "and that you're not talking to my associate artistic director in six months."

Meanwhile, Arena Stage moves on, the worse for wear, with Dobie anchoring a half-empty executive suite and working with a shell-shocked staff to finish programming a season that's only half announced.

Now there's the wreckage to survey: Three years. Five production managers. Millions in losses. A staff that called its Black female boss "uppity."

The Arena board watched all of it. They moved after she tried to program a play about Reconstruction. Is that governance? Or is it a tell? The next artistic director, whoever they are, will want to know. W

Trey Graham writes about arts, culture, and the world we make them in at InGoodCompany.llc.

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Washington's Leading Defense-Tech Innovators

From drones to artificial intelligence, a defense-tech boom is underway, with startups from Silicon Valley and elsewhere joining the traditional DC establishment in rethinking national security. Here are some of the key businesspeople, policymakers, and others shaping the future and keeping us safe.

By Sharon Weinberger
Photographs by Stephen Voss

Washington's defense technologists once followed a familiar path. They circulated through major defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman, spent time at the RAND Corporation or other established think tanks, and moved in and out of the Pentagon E-ring.

Today, things are changing—and quickly. A new military-industrial complex is being shaped as much by Silicon Valley as by the traditional defense establishment. Elon Musk has become a key national-security figure; his space-and-AI company, SpaceX, is one of the Pentagon's most critical private partners. Similarly, the software and data-analytics company Palantir has emerged as one of the world's most valuable defense contractors.

The success of those companies—and others like them—has helped open the doors for hundreds of new enterprises, with venture-capital firms investing nearly $50 billion in defense-technology startups last year. These companies are pitching killer drones, autonomous ships, and AI-powered weapons to receptive audiences in the Pentagon, on Capitol Hill, and in the White House.

This boom has also raised new questions. Can startups manufacture weapons at scale? Will Silicon Valley's twin credos of "Fake it till you make it" and "Move fast and break things" work on the battlefield, where lives are at stake? And how should the government handle potential conflicts of interest as politically connected investors, former administration officials, and even members of the Trump family become involved in startups seeking federal contracts?

While much of the capital and technology in this new defense wave originates in places like El Segundo, Austin, and the Bay Area, the answers to these questions largely will be determined in Washington—home to lawmakers, policy wonks, key investors, and the biggest and most important customer of all, the Pentagon.

With all that in mind, here are 20 of our area's defense-tech leaders, people who are actively shaping what national security will look like in the years to come.



TARA MURPHY DOUGHERTY

CEO, Air

Making us smarter about making and maintaining stuff

Tara Murphy Dougherty was interviewing with the CIA on her college campus the morning of September 11, 2001, when the recruiters' cellphones started ringing. "They stepped out of the room, they came back, they didn't say anything to us," she recalls. "They threw their stuff in their bags and they took off."

The terror attacks of that day only strengthened Dougherty's desire to work in national security. But when she eventually arrived in Washington, she concluded that a career at the CIA would be too bureaucratic for her taste. Instead, she worked in the Pentagon before joining Palantir. Four years later, she was recruited to Air (then known as Govini), a rare Washington-based defense unicorn.

Like Palantir, Air is a data-focused software company, though its focus is less on military intelligence than on identifying vulnerabilities in the defense-industrial base. What does that mean in practice? Dougherty points to an aircraft supporting operations in Iran that was grounded because it required a component with a 250-day lead time. Using Air's software, the government found an equivalent part that could be delivered in three days. "It's not that glamorous an example," she says, "but readiness rates are a big deal."

MINA FALTAS

Founder and CIO, Washington Harbour Partners

A godfather of the new tech-defense axis

In the late 1990s, Faltas—who grew up in Northern Virginia and was working in finance in New York—wandered into the studio of artist Peter Tunney. Looking at the patriotic-themed mixed-media works covering the walls, he made a promise to himself: One day, he would own a Tunney piece.

Today, several of them hang in Faltas's office in Rosslyn—which overlooks DC, the geographic center of the thesis that has guided his investment firm, Washington Harbour Partners. While many investors for years avoided companies doing business with the federal government, Faltas saw the world's leading purchaser of goods and services as an opportunity.

In contrast to many defense-tech investors clustered in other parts of the country, Faltas built his firm around a deep understanding of how Washington works. He recruited a team of technology specialists from New York and San Francisco who wanted to be in the nation's capital, believing that proximity to the federal government offered an advantage few investors possessed.

This helped lead to one of the firm's most consequential relationships: In 2024, Washington Harbour executives traveled to the Bay Area to meet with OpenAI. At that time, the ChatGPT-maker hadn't seriously considered working with Washington. "You only have part of the picture," Faltas recalls telling the company's executives. The federal government, he argued, was the planet's largest IT buyer, and agencies across Washington wanted access to generative-AI tools adapted to their security and data requirements.

Today, OpenAI's models are being deployed across parts of the federal government—including the Pentagon.





TODD YOUNG

Indiana Republican Senator

Looking ahead to a biological arms race

When most people think about cutting-edge defense technology, they picture killer drones or hypersonic missiles. But for Todd Young, one of the most consequential nascent national-security threats is less visible: biotechnology.

As chair of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology, Young has spent the past two years warning that advances in the life sciences could create new vulnerabilities. "Our job in government is to deal with tail risks," he says. "It's to think about creative ways to deal with the risk of catastrophic events happening."

Among the scenarios that concern him are engineered pathogens or toxins designed by hostile actors. "Could a superbug be elegantly designed to attack certain ethnic or racial groups? Yes," he says. "Could a toxin find its way into America's food supply with a delayed-onset illness or other biological effects that could decapitate our society? Yes, those things can be produced."

Young argues that the best defense is sustained investment in American biotechnology. That means putting resources into education, research infrastructure, genetic sequencing, and stronger partnerships among government, industry, and academia. "The extent to which we can educate this generation of people to be biotech experts and world leaders in all realms of biotechnology," he says, "we will harden ourselves against these types of risks."

EMIL MICHAEL

Undersecretary of War for Research and Engineering

The Pentagon's tech emissary

Once best known as the take-no-prisoners Uber executive who helped orchestrate the ride-sharing company's rapid global expansion, Michael has reemerged a decade later in a very different role: as the Pentagon's top technology official.

His appointment is notable because the position was once associated with physicists, engineers, and career defense technologists. Michael's rise reflects the growing influence of Silicon Valley executives and venture capitalists in shaping US defense policy. Defense-industry leaders praise him for moving quickly to bring new companies into the Pentagon's orbit and for accelerating efforts to expand military production.

His highest-profile test so far has been the Pentagon's public battle with the AI company Anthropic over the military's use of the firm's models. The dispute intensified after a US operation that captured Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, prompting the company to question whether its technology had been involved.

Michael was incensed at Anthropic. "The 'whoa moment' was after the Maduro raid, when Anthropic raised concerns about how their software might have been used and knowing that the Iran conflict was pretty close in time to that," he says. "What would happen if we were dependent on a software provider that decided they didn't like it and turned it off?"

How does a former Silicon Valley executive evaluate defense startups pitching technologies? With an eye on trustworthiness—and a dose of skepticism. "My BS detectors are all along the way, and at the end it's like, can we work [together]?" Michael says. "Because once you start working with a partner for an important drone or counter-drone or missile, you're going to be working with them for decades, likely."



16 More Leaders

DMITRI ALPEROVITCH

Cofounder and Chairman, Silverado Policy Accelerator

The cofounder and former chief technology officer of the cybersecurity company Crowdstrike is now focusing on making the US more competitive with China in areas such as rare-earth minerals.

JOSHUA BOEHM

Chief Growth Officer, Spirit Defense, a Boeing Company

While many of Silicon Valley's newly minted defense-tech bros rally around the mantra "It's time to build," a number of longtime military contractors make an important counterpoint: They're already building. Leading Spirit's defense business in DC, Boehm has helped expand the company's manufacturing work for the Pentagon. Recently acquired by Boeing, Spirit makes critical components for a number of military airframes, including the newest stealth bomber, the B-21.

CHRIS BROSE

President and Chief Strategy Officer, Anduril Industries

A onetime staffer to the late Republican Arizona senator John McCain, Brose joined Anduril when it was a little-known defense startup founded by Palmer Luckey, who became a billionaire after selling his virtual-reality company to Facebook. Today, Anduril is a pack leader of a new generation of defense startups and is producing drones, unmanned submarines, and software designed to link autonomous weapons. Brose is credited with helping the company navigate federal bureaucracy.

DAN DRISCOLL
Secretary of the Army

President Trump dubbed Driscoll "the Drone Guy," a nod to his work reforming how the Army buys unmanned aircraft and other technology. Since becoming the youngest Secretary of the Army, he has pushed to move new technologies to the battlefield.

STEVE FEINBERG
Deputy Secretary of War

The secretive private-equity billionaire has spent his career assiduously—but not always successfully—avoiding press coverage. He founded Cerberus Capital Management, which has invested in everything from hospitals to private military contractors. Today, Feinberg is the second-highest-ranking official in the Trump administration's Department of War and has spearheaded the Pentagon's efforts to marry Wall Street-style financing with Pentagon procurement, including a unit jokingly called "Deal Team 6."

DAN GWAK
Chief Investment Officer, IQT

Gwak, who deployed as a Marine to Afghanistan, now leads investment strategy for IQT—the CIA's venture arm. An early investor in Palantir, IQT has long served as a gateway for startups that want to work with the Agency and other intelligence services.

JACOB HELBERG
Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs

A former Palantir adviser, Helberg founded the influential Hill & Valley Forum, an annual event that brings together Silicon Valley tech luminaries and Washington lawmakers. He's also the architect of Pax Silica, a US-led effort to work with countries to ensure the supply chain for critical technologies needed for AI, semiconductors, and rare-earth minerals.

SUNMIN KIM
Head of Strategy, Kela Technologies

Kim held senior roles at the Defense Innovation Unit—the organization established to bring technology from commercial companies into the military—before joining the Israeli defense-tech startup Kela, which received funds from IQT, among others. In Washington, she's helping Kela establish a foothold in the Pentagon market.

MARK LEWIS
President and CEO, Purdue Applied Research Institute

A former university professor who also served in senior roles in the Pentagon, Lewis has long been one of the most forceful advocates of hypersonic weapons—missiles and aircraft that travel at more than five times the speed of sound, making them exceptionally fast and exceedingly difficult to shoot down. Venture capital is now rushing to fund a number of new companies building such weapons, based on years of research and engineering that Lewis championed.

ALI REZA MANOUCHEHRI
CEO and Cofounder, MetroStar

Based in Reston, the defense-tech firm MetroStar didn't emerge from the venture-funded world of Silicon Valley. Instead, Iranian-born Manouchehri founded the company in 1999 to help the federal government with Y2K issues. Today, it works on a variety of defense technologies, including AI-enabled wearable headsets that allow aircraft mountaineers to operate in hazardous environments.

MARGARET MULLINS
Director of Public Options and Governance, Vanderbilt Policy Accelerator

Mullins, who worked in the Pentagon during the Biden administration, has emerged as a prominent skeptic of some of Silicon Valley's most enthusiastic defense claims—and promises. "Washington should not rush to accept Silicon Valley's critique as gospel," she recently wrote, urging Pentagon procurement reform that matches ambition with reality.

WAHID NAWABI
CEO, AeroVironment

Nawabi emigrated to the area from Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion of 1979. He likes to remind people that, unlike many of the new defense startups, AeroVironment's drones have been flying in military operations, including in Ukraine, for years.

OLEG ROGYNSKYY
CEO, Uforce

An entrepreneur who became CEO of the first Ukrainian defense-tech unicorn—a privately held startup valued at more than $1 billion—the Washington-based Rogynskyy says those inside Uforce like to contrast its hard-earned battlefield experience against Silicon Valley startups with limited or no track record in military operations: "While other companies are patrolling trade shows, we are patrolling the straits."

DAVID ROTHZEID
Principal, Shield Capital

After serving at the Pentagon's Defense Innovation Unit, Rothzeid moved into venture capital, where he's investing in the next wave of defense-tech startups.

HEIDI SHYU
Former Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering

As the Pentagon's chief technology officer and Emil Michael's predecessor during the Biden administration, Shyu created many of the programs, such as the Office of Strategic Capital, that the Trump administration is using to boost new defense companies. Now back in the private sector, she continues to work with firms involved in new defense technologies.

JOHN TENET
Founder, Chaos Industries

The Washington-based son of former CIA director George Tenet has been involved in nearly every phase of the defense-tech boom. An early investor in Anduril, he went on to cofound Epirus, a maker of high-powered microwave weapons designed to counter drone swarms. He then launched Chaos Industries, another counter-drone startup. W

Sharon Weinberger is author of the forthcoming book Valley of Death: How Big Tech Is Fueling the Future of War.

GUESS WHAT?



By Chris Almeida
Photographs by April Greer



Online ridicule helped DC influencer Anthony Polcari go viral—and make money. As his social-media star wanes, he's looking to jump to television. But can he afford to leave his snarkiest followers behind?

TONY P HATES YOU, TOO.

I did not know the man on the screen, but I saw him all the time.

He'd pop up between other things in my Instagram feed: a guy playing golf, a beautiful woman, a hand running a knife sideways over the crispy skin of a piece of pork belly. I watched him walk toward the camera and point at his outfit—lavender shirt, blue slacks, purple tie—before cracking an awkward smile and crossing his arms. I watched him make dinner. That was disconcerting. He didn't seem to be much of a cook; I'd never seen someone chop with such hesitation. He talked about how he spent his time in Washington, a city I knew pretty well. But he never did much of anything I hadn't thought of before.

Other people started sending me videos of the man on the screen. *Why is he smiling like that? Why is he putting the oil on the salmon that way? Why is he so excited about this new-development restaurant? Is this some kind of elaborate bit?* I wasn't sure, even as I kept seeing him more and more. The *Washington Post* profiled him and assured readers it wasn't a bit.



jjmccullough
Masculinity has never been this vibrant

The man on the screen tagged all the brands in his posts. A baseball team, a shoe company, a fast-casual food chain, an ice-cream company, a local golf course. It was hard to tell what he was being paid for and what was just a public attempt to get some free stuff. Either way, the getting seemed good. A sandwich chain flew him out to the Midwest. A ticket company sent him to a football game. He got a promo code that was also his name.

The man on the screen drew the attention of somebody on Capitol Hill. The Democratic Party was starting to panic about reaching younger people, so a senator in his late sixties ended up in a video awkwardly crossing his arms with the man on the screen. That was his thing now, the arm-crossing. He called it the "arm roll." He had another thing, too. He called it "vibrant masculinity." The concept wasn't fully baked—it seemed to be about being a kind man who sometimes wore a flashy tie. Nevertheless, a few months later, he talked to another senator, a younger one who seemed to have his eyes on the presidency, about being a man.

Some people in the comments had always made fun of the man on the screen. Over time, their derision became the main attraction. They mocked his hair, his gait, the way he chose to play a *Wheel of Fortune* simulator after dinner. They sexualized him to belittle him: *Don't let my wife see this.* It was funny, you see, because he was cleaning his apartment and talking about how he was practicing to be a caregiver for a family that he would have one day but that currently did not exist. It would have been easier to just watch the video, wonder what the point of it was, and move on, but these people kept at it. Eventually, they settled on a refrain that grew louder and louder. *Hog reveal?* Meaning his penis.



neonindiian
Do you guys think this is a bit / a character or his actual personality

The man on the screen paid them no mind, at least as far as I could tell. He kept posting. He did a six-month campaign for a famous coffee-and-doughnut chain, which ended in a post about his dead grandmother and all the places he'd had coffee and doughnuts with her when he was a child. The comments were brutal. *You're pimping out your dead grandma for cash?* He took the post down. The chain was cool with that. Later, though, he would tell me he regretted nothing—that his grandmother, pimped out or not, was laughing in heaven. Besides, the campaign paid him roughly $45,000.

Sometimes I wondered how the man on the screen lived with all of this.

TONY P—DOWN TENS OF thousands of followers from his peak and making hundreds of thousands less than he did when he first went viral—is pissed. The first time we speak formally, the conversation lasts four hours. The man on the screen has a lot to get off his chest. As it turns out, he sees the comments. They bother him.

That hairline is hanging on for dear life.

Tony P but the P stands for Prepubescent physique.

Tone why does your apartment look like a fancy Holiday Inn?

Tone have you ever been in a room with other people?

"I am done sugarcoating it for them," he says about some of his followers, whom he calls haters. "I am done being humble for them. I am done saying that I suck at everything, because half of my followers hate me. Good! Because, guess what, I hate them, too."

For about three years now, Tony P—known offline as Anthony Polcari—has been buffeted and boosted by forces beyond his control. Mention him to most people and they'll look at you with confusion, perhaps wondering why you're asking them about what sounds like a *Bachelorette* contestant. But among young people in the DC area, the 27-year-old seems to have greater name recognition than any member of the Washington Wizards.

In 2023, about two years after his college graduation, Tony went viral on Instagram. He did not do trendy dances. He did not show hog. He simply posted day-in-the-life vlogs in which he traversed the city as a white-collar transplant and videos filmed in his apartment in which he modeled, runway-style, the most normal office wear you can imagine. He showed us what he did before going on dates, even though he was mostly just shaving and getting dressed.



americanasfuck
Tone why does your apartment look like a fancy Holiday Inn

Mundane? Sure. But people watched. Lots. At one point, Tony appeared to have about 225,000 followers. They were drawn, perhaps, by his unusual sincerity or by the somewhat rare representation of yuppie life in Washington. The algorithm, famously, can be gamed for the right price, but sometimes somebody will just

stumble into being noticed and be left to deal with the consequences. Tony became an influencer, as famous as someone with a low-six-figure follower count can be, and something of a local meme.

Being a meme paid well. Asked about money, Tony gets a little squirrelly. The only time he goes off record is when discussing his earnings. Still, he's comfortable disclosing this: During his last year in an office job, at a small consulting firm, he made just under six figures. In his first two years influencing, 2023 and 2024, he made about half a million dollars.



ryantu99
Tony P and the P stands for Prepubescent physique

That math led Tony to quit his day job. Not long after, things turned. Brands found other ways to spend money. People found other things to watch. Viewers who remained became increasingly snarky, even cruel. They were in on a shared joke, and Tony was the butt of it. Last year, his income dipped below what he'd made in his office job. These days, Tony knows the clock is ticking, that what he calls his 25 minutes of fame might soon be over. "I stretched it out a decent amount of time," he says. "A year and a half is not bad. I think 15 minutes is like, you know, Hawk Tuah."

Tony knows he has more to offer than a quip about fellatio. He's trying to pivot. Away from social media and toward broadcasting. Tony announced sporting events in high school and a little bit in college. He's been working for the local Fox station. On television, he believes, he can still make money and chase his dreams, without the haters demanding hog. It's an open question whether he'll succeed in trading one screen for another—or if the new screen will free him from all the problems that have come with the current one.

IN 2023, THE YEAR TONY STARTED posting in earnest, 57 percent of Generation Z wanted to be influencers. Perhaps that's because, on social media, you don't need to become an enormous star to enjoy some of the financial benefits of celebrity. Michael Jordan once sold shoes and sports drinks to the monoculture masses. Tony P can sell chicken marinade to twenty-somethings without much experience in the kitchen. "Brands are willing to pay more if a creator has cultivated a dedicated following," says Brooke Erin Duffy, a professor at Cornell who studies social media. "Creators with smaller followings seem to furnish higher levels of engagement."

This seems like a nice life, if you don't think about it too hard. Order whatever you'd like: The meal is on the house. You don't have to save up for that piece of clothing or gear—it'll be at your door almost as soon as you ask for it. Want to go on vacation? Somebody might pick up the tab on that, too. Or as Tony puts it, "FootJoy is sending me stuff. Cava. Comcast, who I'm a customer of, calls. I'm like, 'What?' This is freaking crazy, right? All these big brands, like the Nationals, the Commanders, are paying me to go to games. I'm sitting in the suite and I get paid?"

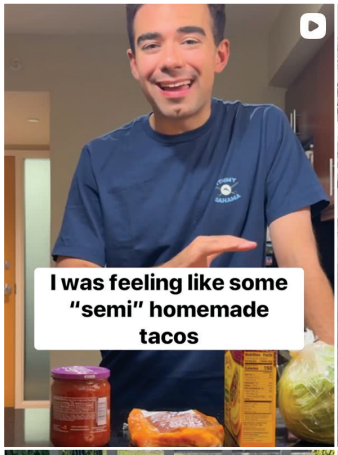
But brands do not work with you because they love you. They work with you because you're a good billboard, and if traffic on your stretch of the highway goes down, the deals will dry up. So keep the numbers high. Give people what they came for. You may decide that a certain post is too degrading, that a potential sponsor is the wrong fit, that subjecting your daily life to the parasocial scrutiny of online strangers is profoundly unhealthy, but then those goodies may stop appearing on your doorstep. Is that something you're okay with? Or will you do what you need to do to generate attention?

I asked Jack Sacco, Tony's childhood friend, what he was like as a kid. "You'll probably call him Tony," he told me. "But to me, he's always been AJ: Anthony John. So the whole 'Tony P' moniker is never how I refer to him. But I respect the brand name."



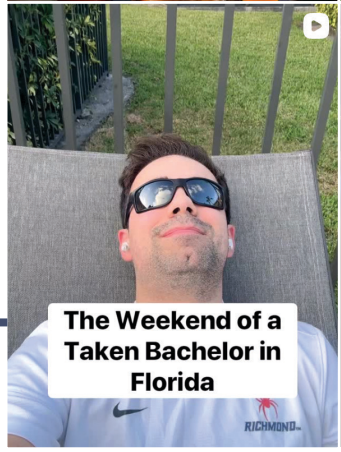
rickymyers
Jesus Christ Tone please go to therapy

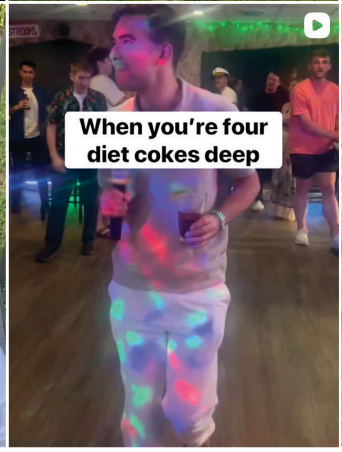
Anthony John was an only child, a teacher's pet, a boy with few friends in grade school. He had to change something, he says, "to make myself palatable. I thought Anthony was not a very attractive name. So













Anthony Polcari—known online as Tony P—went viral on Instagram by posting the seemingly mundane details of his life as a white-collar transplant in the District.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM @_TONYPINDC/INSTAGRAM

I changed my name to AJ, because I thought it was cooler. And one of my buddies, who was one of the cool kids that liked me in the early years, was named AJ, and he had changed his name early on. So I thought, 'Okay, I'll do the same thing as him.'

"I also thought it would get me attention. And it did."

Tony says he took an unusually long time to start talking, leading his aunt to worry and advise his parents to take him to speech therapy. About six months later, he started gabbing. The joke in Tony's family is that he hasn't shut up since. He was a fibber early on: In second grade, he told his class he was going to have a sibling, because he remembered a classmate who'd gotten attention when a new baby in his family was born.

As a tween, Tony started playing golf, becoming obsessed with the game. He was always insecure about not being a great athlete. If he succeeded on the course, he figured, it would prove he wasn't less of a man than the jocks. In middle school, he got his first taste of broadcasting as the anchor on the morning announcements. He relished the performance, getting to use some of the skills he'd learned in drama club. In high school, he started announcing sporting events via livestream—football games, golf matches, hockey, basketball, even water polo. He'd delight in talking to the baseball players about their walk-up songs. He wasn't quite one of the jocks, but they were close enough.



samoharris

That hairline is hanging on for dear life.

Tony also started getting positive feedback, from classmates and their parents: "It wasn't just that they would say, 'Oh, he's so cute.' It was a kind of affirmation that mattered. It was, 'This seems like it's effortless to you and you're a natural.' "

A mentor suggested Tony take a look at Syracuse University, a factory for future sportscasters, but he thought it too impractical. He was from a middle-class family, and his parents had already stretched financially to send him to a private high school. He wasn't going to take out loans so he could spend years or decades doing local news in small towns across the country, hoping to get a call-up to a big city. Instead, he did what a practical person does. He went to the University of Richmond and studied accounting.

Tony took a job at KPMG in Massachusetts after graduating but found it "utterly boring," so he applied for a gig at a small consulting firm in DC. He got it and started in the summer of 2022. He enjoyed being a yuppie—he had no reservations about the kickball leagues and work drinks. He went on Hinge and embarked on a handful of short-term relationships. The last one broke his heart. At work, he was visibly down in the dumps. His boss intervened.



mcarifi0

Someone's wife is about to have the night of her life

"He was like, 'Hey, what have you been wanting to do that you haven't done because you haven't had enough time or you were just too chicken to do it?' " Tony recalls. "And I'm like, 'Well, you know, I've been watching these influencers recently.' "



At his peak popularity, Tony P offered what he called "vibrant masculinity." Increasingly snarky followers demanded "hog."

BEFORE ALL THIS STARTED, Tony says, he hated social media. He never used Facebook or YouTube. He posted on Instagram, but infrequently and reluctantly. But in Washington, he started seeing accounts meant for people just like him: young transplants who weren't too cool to go to meetups.

"They would say, 'Here's how you make friends in DC,' " he says. " 'Go to these places, try here, do this,' and I would do those things, and they would work. And I really would enjoy it. And I thought, 'I kind of know what it's like to feel kind of alone in a new city and be anxious. You know, what if I do something like that?' "

Tony began posting, giving himself a creative outlet and trying to help others like him. He didn't expect it to go anywhere. Maybe, at best, he'd pick up a few thousand followers and find a way to make a few hundred bucks a month on top of his salary. His first posts as Tony P, from May 2023, aren't that different from his current ones—outfit-modeling, "weekend



clavegs
Too many buttons big T, unbutton a couple and let that Hasselhoff out

in my life" montages—but they're less polished, with dead air and delivery stumbles. Still, they hit.

"It just gets from 50,000 to 100,000 to 500,000 views," he recalls. "Then it starts, like, *really* going up." Tony sounds increasingly excited. "And, like, the follower count starts to tick up. It's 20,000. It's 30,000. It's, like, 65,000. What the f--- is this? Right? It's just going viral."

The local news called. That gave him a bump. Then the *Post*. Another bump. "People are stopping me in f---ing bars and restaurants," he says. "I'm going to clubs in DC, and I'm going to the front of the line." At a work outing at a Nats game, he got mobbed by fans and worried that the partners at his job would be upset about his side hustle. Instead, they were amused. If anything, it would be good for the company.

The brand deals started coming in. Seven thousand dollars for one post. Tony had never seen a check that big in his life. But, he says, "to be honest with you, I felt like . . . before it took off and I was getting 20 likes . . . I felt better then than I do now."

The haters soon hijacked the show. Every comment section filled up with them. "I have this intense anger at those people," Tony says. "It's like, just leave me the f--- alone, right? Just please just scroll by. I'd like to someday open my account and not have to read those comments."

On the other hand, Tony admits, "my business is directly tied to those haters. Like, when my mother and I did a cooking video together and guys made sexual jokes about my mother. Would I have got that money without the hate-watching? Because I got a lot of comments or hate-watching views, right? And maybe the algorithm pushed it out to the people that really liked what I did."



deepthinkingdaily
Ehhhh what do we think guys? Is cyber-bullying really worth it on this one?

Social media exists to engage: The more we click and scroll, the more advertisements can be pumped in front of our eyeballs. Content that elicits negative emotions—dunks on political rivals and outrageous news stories, sure, but even anodyne cooking demonstrations for the right kind of viewer—is particularly good at holding our gaze. To be an influencer is to invite, almost by default, a Greek chorus of haters into your life. You may not like them, but you're probably not getting paid without their attention.

At some level, Tony knows this. I'm reminded of a video he once posted from Times Square, in which he waxed poetic about how great seeing the place is "when you're passionate about marketing and branding."

"Maybe I do have to give credit to some of the hate-watchers, even though I can't stand them," he says. "I have to give them credit for, potentially, helping to grow my reach."

ON A COLD DAY IN MARCH, I meet Tony at his office in a coworking space on K Street. He uses it for free, because he helps the owners out with—what else?—advertising. Tony guides the company on its own content and tags the place every once in a while in his posts. His personal piece of the place is a modest room without much in it: a desk, a bookshelf, a Coca-Cola-branded mini fridge where he puts a Chick-fil-A milkshake he's saving for later.

Tony shows me some decorations he's picked up from Eastern Market. It's a series of old magazine ads. Bell phones. Coca-Cola, again. Johnny Carson sitting in a chair with a massive Saint Bernard at his feet, a full-pager for Smirnoff vodka.

We sit down in a conference room and talk about where Tony wants to go. He's smarter, shrewder, than his haters give him credit for. Seemingly every day, another washed-up influencer starts hawking a meme coin in a desperate attempt to avoid going back to the world the rest of us live in. But even at Tony's peak, he understood he wasn't going to make money online forever. Back in 2023, he began appearing on Fox 5—first as a morning-show subject, then as a panelist on *Like It or Not,* a nightly lifestyle show. After chopping it up with the hosts, he was invited back, eventually landing a paid contributor role.

Today, Tony does work for the station every weeknight. He has a nightly program called *Live Zone Primetime* that streams online. On Tuesdays, he does five different shows, most of which are on the linear station. He's just a contractor, though, and says his broadcasting earnings cover only about 30 percent of his expenses. He makes up the difference with his consulting work—he started his own independent firm in late 2024—and online brand deals.

Watch Tony on TV and you can tell he's still learning how to host. He stumbles at times but is notably less awkward than during his early appearances. Tony says he cares deeply about learning the craft and that he wants "Coca-Cola fame"—not the "Tab fame" of social media. He sees television as a place for polished products, where succeeding as an on-camera personality involves more than just the good fortune—or dumb luck—of the algorithm smiling upon you.



poolebrianscott
I hate this guy

I believe Tony. I also wonder if television represents a potential escape. Repeatedly, he told me how much he resented getting flak from his followers. This includes the obvious haters and gleeful cyberbullies, but also the genuine

CONTINUED ON **PAGE 150**

NOW COMES THE *HARD* PART

By **IKE ALLEN**

Photograph by **EVY MAGES**





Presumptive DC congressional delegate Robert White wants to deliver economic wins—and statehood—to Washington. As a largely powerless Capitol Hill newcomer in a time of deep political division, he faces an uphill climb.



White voted in June's primary election alongside his daughters, Monroe and Madison.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG HUDSON FOR *WASHINGTON POST* VIA GETTY IMAGES

RIGHT AROUND MIDNIGHT, SOME four hours after polls closed on primary-election day in mid-June, Robert White stomped into the Howard Theatre. Wearing a blue suit, a striped tie, and gray New Balance sneakers, he jogged up to his DC Council colleague Janeese Lewis George. As campaign volunteers and staff took out their phones to capture the moment, he gave her a long bear hug.

Though votes were still being counted, Lewis George's team was pretty sure she'd won the Democratic mayoral primary. White's supporters were even more jubilant. He had trounced Brooke Pinto, his main Democratic rival in the race for the District's nonvoting congressional delegate, making his win in the November general all but inevitable. If and when White is sworn in next January, he'll become the third person to hold the job since it was established in 1971—and the first new representative since Eleanor Holmes Norton, the city's legendary "Warrior on the Hill," took office in 1991.

Had things gone a little differently, however, White might have been celebrating a mayoral victory. A fifth-generation Washingtonian, he'd wanted the job for years and ran for it in 2022, deciding only last summer to run for Congress instead. During his victory speech that night at a raucous watch party in Southwest DC, the charismatic 44-year-old at times sounded more like a triumphant mayor-elect than a future House member whose unusual role in the national legislature is largely symbolic. "I will not yield the fight for families drowning in the cost of housing, groceries, childcare, and healthcare," White told the crowd. "I will not yield in the fight for workers who did everything right but lie awake at night wondering how it's all going to work."

Last fall, 55 percent of respondents to a *Washington Post* poll said they were unhappy with the District's direction, the highest number since Marion Barry's fourth mayoral term in the 1990s. Some of that discontent came from anger at the Trump administration's law-enforcement takeover and other meddling in local affairs; some was driven by simmering economic anxiety, a struggle to afford daily life. During his campaign, White ran as both a fighter and a change agent: someone who would stand up for DC's self-governance, as Norton once did, while also delivering on kitchen-table priorities.

"The average person in DC doesn't realize how much the delegate role can play a part in their economic reality," White says. "But what they'll see over the next couple years is me working inside of the federal government to bring new jobs to DC, to bring more affordable housing to DC, and to be a voice in Congress saying, 'Hey, people sent us here to help them in their everyday lives.' "

How much help White can deliver remains to be seen. In the best circumstances, DC's delegate has little real power. Created in 1970, the position gives the city's nearly 700,000 residents a voice in Congress via speechmaking and bill introduction—but not an actual vote on the House floor. Similar to actual representatives, the delegate can exert influence via plum committee assignments and, when their party controls the chamber, via a vote in the informal Committee of the Whole.

A civil-rights icon who served for 18 terms, Norton brought seniority and

In his victory speech, White promised not to yield.

Congress is sure to test that promise.

gravitas to the office, using both to win goodies from the feds while slowly advancing the cause of DC statehood. White, by contrast, will be starting from near scratch—and entering a fraught political environment. From Congress's overturning of local laws to the President's keen, often unwelcome interest in local landscaping, the current Republican administration has repeatedly big-footed the District and its leaders, making cooperation and compromise more difficult. Meanwhile, the national Democratic Party that White will be relying on for leverage and support is fragmented between moderates and progressives, sometimes seemingly more interested in fighting each other



In 2023, White spoke out against Congress's overturning of DC Council-approved changes to the city's criminal code.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALLISON BAILEY/NURPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

than MAGA. On primary night, White promised not to yield. Capitol Hill is sure to test that promise.

Repaying a Debt

The scar is still visible: a thin line running ear to ear over the top of White's clean-shaven head. He got it when he was eight years old. It was October 24, 1990, less than two weeks before Norton's first election to Congress. A few weeks earlier, White's mother had died of breast cancer. He was riding to school with his brother and stepbrother in the back of a car driven by his stepmother on New Hampshire Avenue when a sludge-hauling truck exiting the Beltway collided with a car in the opposite lane.

The vehicle landed on the hood of the White family's car. White suffered the most serious injuries: His skull was fractured, and the roof of his mouth collapsed. Initially, doctors told his family to prepare for the worst. Multiple surgeries helped him survive, but a long recovery contributed to struggles at school for years. White failed every grade from third through tenth, retaking classes every summer. He became something of a class clown and decided to change course only when a guidance counselor told him to consider the military instead of college. Getting serious about his studies, he transferred to Archbishop Carroll High School, where he eventually took Advanced Placement classes. To earn money, he also swept floors at Midtown Barbershop on Kennedy Street, the same place he launched his congressional campaign last October.

Roots matter to White: His family traces its local ties back to the mid-19th century, and for years his father, Robert "Bobby" White Sr., was deacon at St. Augustine Catholic Church off U Street, known as the "mother church of Black Catholics." After his mother's death, White and his father moved around DC, at one point living with his grandparents on 15th Street, Northwest, across the street from former mayor Sharon Pratt's aunt. Pratt got to know the Whites. "It's a lovely family," she says of them.

At St. Mary's College of Maryland, White became head of the Black Student Union—and befriended his successor, Brandon Scott, now mayor of Baltimore. At the time, both were becoming interested in politics and leadership. Today, White says, they continue to compare notes. At American University's law school, White met his wife, Christy, now a high-ranking attorney at the Securities and Exchange Commission. The two began as platonic drinking buddies—she "was my wingwoman," White has said—and later fell in love. Married at the Corcoran Gallery in 2012, they have two daughters, Monroe and Madison, seven and ten.

White credits his father, his church, and his friends' families with keeping him on the right track as a young man. "At every stage in life when I could have fallen through the cracks," he said in his victory speech, "somebody in this city caught me." That support, he says, has made him feel a debt to DC—one he has since sought to repay through public service. Growing up with a father he's described as a "political-news junkie," White had a longtime interest in politics but no connections and no real idea of how to find a way in. Following law school, he clerked in a Montgomery County courthouse and figured he would go into private practice.

Then came a 2008 opportunity to work in Norton's office. Serving as her legislative counsel, White burned the candle at both ends, managing legislative issues in the House and subcommittee tasks for DC-related Senate hearings. "I usually worked 12-to-15-hour days, seven days a week," he recalls. "It's a shock that I married my wife, with the number of times I stood her up." White focused on protecting DC from congressional meddling via the budget-approval process and later on federal land-redevelopment projects such as the Wharf and the Walter Reed campus. He also helped shepherd the DC House Voting Rights Act, Norton-sponsored legislation that would have given the District's delegate a House vote. In 2007, the bill passed in the House but failed to garner enough Senate votes to overcome a Republican







A fifth-generation Washingtonian, White has deep local roots: He met his wife, Christy, while studying law at American University (above), later worked for longtime DC delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (right), and has served on the DC Council for nearly a decade.

filibuster. Two years later, White watched it clear the Senate—only to die in the House when Democrats balked at a GOP-added, NRA-backed amendment that would have wiped out DC's gun laws.

At the time, Democrats were riding high: Barack Obama had just won the presidential election in a landslide and the party controlled both houses of Congress with a brief filibuster-proof Senate majority. Statehood advocates have since criticized Norton and her office for not doing more to exploit the moment, but White remembers things differently. "Democrats did not seem to have the stomach at the time to really fight for statehood, or frankly on a lot of issues," he says.

By the time White left Norton's office in 2013, DC felt like a different city from the one where he grew up. "Our population was growing by 1,000 to 1,300 new residents per month, there were cranes everywhere, money was flowing in, I'm working on the Wharf, Navy Yard, Hill East, Walter Reed, the city is booming," White says. "But when you left the Capitol and drove over the bridge to Southeast, it all looked the same as it did in the '80s and '90s. And my family was, piece by piece, being priced out of the city."

Believing that city government wasn't meeting the moment, White challenged Anita Bonds for an open council seat in 2014. He finished fourth, with 8 percent of the vote. Newly elected attorney general Karl Racine hired White to direct community outreach, and two years later he again ran for an at-large seat, taking on scandal-stricken 12-year incumbent Vincent Orange. Turning some of Racine's consultants into a crack campaign team, White ran on remedying the city's housing crunch and attacked Orange's plan to do the same by providing 1,000 tiny homes to millennials and seniors. He won in an upset.

Today, White presents like a political natural: polished but accessible; typically clad in a dress shirt, slacks, and Nike Dunks; comfortable chatting with every type of city resident. "He also just really likes people," says Martha Mitchell, White's congressional campaign chair. His fluency across different DC circles has allowed him to string together a coalition of Black and white, young and old, progressive and moderate, and a personal touch has underlain his most significant accomplishments on the council. Two weeks after his first winning primary, White's older daughter was born. He and Christy struggled to find affordable childcare. Soon after, he championed a bill with council member Vincent Gray designed to raise pay and cut costs for early-childhood educators.

White has always been close with his brother, Michael, who is just 15 months older. While Robert struggled in school, his brother excelled—but as they got older, Michael developed an alcohol problem. In 2006, he hit someone with his car while driving drunk and then fled from the police. He ended up in prison. Following his 2008 release, he slept on couches and in his car. It took Michael years, his brother says, to recover his life and family relationships. He eventually got a job with a software company in Georgia.

Michael was on White's mind when he worked on legislation to improve services for formerly incarcerated people, create housing vouchers for those just out of jail, and require the city to provide housing and employment advice to DC residents exiting federal prisons. After the council passed White's signature "returning citizens" bill and Mayor Muriel Bowser signed it into law, he says, "it felt like I had done something real. A lot of my work on the council, more than most people realize, reflects what I went through and what I saw."

Going Where the Fight Is

One Sunday last summer, White and his wife were driving home from church. President Trump's law-enforcement takeover was underway. White had run for mayor in 2022, proposing government jobs for all DC residents who wanted them. Having failed to unseat Bowser, he was considering another campaign.

Suddenly, Christy spoke up. *Drop your plans for mayor*, she told him. *Run for Congress instead.*

"She said, 'If Trump doesn't like Bowser, he's really not going to like you,' " White recalls. "But the second thing she said that really captured my attention, and I couldn't debate, was, 'At this pace, we won't have a mayor in four years.' "

As a practical political decision, a pivot made sense: At the time, Bowser was expected to run for a fourth term, and White says he "heard murmurings" of an internal poll that showed he'd have a hard time beating her. Then there was Trump, whose return to the White House had been hard on the city. Federal layoffs and shutdowns had hurt the local economy. The sight of Immigration and Customs Enforcement

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ROBERT WHITE

agents pulling over random drivers on 14th Street distressed and outraged Washingtonians. On the campaign trail, Trump had repeatedly promised to "take over the horribly run capital of our nation." On the Hill, Republicans were moving in that direction: In the coming months, they would threaten to reverse DC policies on gun regulation, speed cameras, and even turning right on red. Home rule—the District's limited form of self-government that dates back to 1973—seemed under threat.

Bowser was in an unenviable position. DC is a deep-blue city, and many increasingly ticked-off locals wanted her to stand up to Trump and the GOP. But Bowser also needed to work with them on issues like redeveloping the RFK Stadium site—and carefully calibrate just how hard to push back, lest they further erode the city's autonomy. Any new mayor, White included, would likely walk the same tightrope. Meanwhile, the then-88-year-old Norton's fitness for office was being questioned, privately and publicly. No longer a forceful and energetic advocate, she would soon be the victim of an elder-fraud scam, with a police report revealing that she was living with a caretaker and exhibiting the "early stages of dementia" (Norton's office disputed this).

White realized his wife was right. Congress was where he could make the biggest impact—and where the most urgent fight was. The prospect of taking on Norton, he admits, was "delicate, to say the least." But people close to his former boss assured him he wouldn't have to run against her for long—and in January, Norton announced her retirement.

White pitched himself as a native son who knew what it felt like to "pack up and move because rent went up again, to watch your neighborhood slip away as prices rise." Describing Trump's law-enforcement takeover as "lawlessness" and criticizing the presence of National Guard troops on the city's streets, he vowed to push for a bill Norton introduced last year that would shift command of DC's National Guard from the President to the mayor.



White failed to unseat Mayor Muriel Bowser (above, center) in 2022 and planned to run again before changing course.

White also promised to fight. "I want to see a time again where you are rewarded for reaching across the aisle," he said at a March candidate debate, "but right now, everyone who reaches across the aisle comes back missing a finger or two."

Though he and Pinto usually sit side by side on the council dais and have worked together on bills, their race was remarkably vitriolic by local standards. White accused Pinto of conducting "no real oversight" of federal agents during Trump's takeover and of changing her position on legislation governing the release of Metro Police body-cam footage to score political points. Pinto attacked White for fighting against provisions in a crime bill that she spearheaded, failing to dampen rising home prices despite heading the council's housing committee, and voting against the RFK Stadium redevelopment championed by Bowser. In April, she released a 67-page opposition-research report that included a photo and the address of White's family home—as well as details about a Pinterest page, allegedly connected to his father, that included saved pins titled "Accessories sex" and "Guilty pleasure."

Saying Pinto had crossed a line that "decent people should never cross," White called on her to drop out of the race. Pinto's campaign quickly removed information about White's family from the document and apologized. It was a disastrous misstep, one that may have helped White beat

Suddenly, Christy spoke up.

Drop your plans for mayor, she told him. Run for Congress instead.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NATHAN POSNER FOR GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF POLITICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE/SHUTTERSTOCK



Promising jobs, affordable housing, and to stand up for DC, White won the Democratic primary by 42 points over his closest rival.

Pinto by 42 points despite being outspent two to one.

November's election is considered a foregone conclusion: 75 percent of DC voters are registered Democrats—a higher number than any state—and Norton defeated her Republican opponent by 74 points in 2024. For White, the hard part will come after he takes office. Like the mayor, DC's delegate has to strike a delicate balance between sometimes resisting the federal government and at other times asking it for favors. That's tougher when the GOP controls the White House, Congress, or both—after all, a big, liberal city associated in the popular imagination with elites and bureaucrats is an easy target for Republicans looking to show off to their voters back home.

Fellow Democrats aren't guaranteed to support White's goals, either. Last fall, a number of them joined House Republicans in advancing bills to block local criminal-justice reform. Complicating matters is an emerging rift between the party's rising left wing—epitomized by Mayor Zohran Mamdani in New York City and Janeese Lewis George in DC—and its more moderate, still-powerful center. White will need allies in House leadership, not just the insurgent left, to get things done.

Where White sits on the Democratic spectrum can be hard to pin down. When he first won office, he was seen as someone who would join Brianne Nadeau and Charles Allen on the council's left. But over the ensuing decade, he resisted being pigeonholed. White endorsed Lewis George, a Democratic Socialist, in the mayoral race. But he also scored lower than both her and her centrist opponent, Kenyan McDuffie, on a scorecard released by the pro-statehood activist network Free DC, which ultimately endorsed him anyway. Progressives who have worked with White have sometimes been left feeling disillusioned, and some of his past staffers tell *Washingtonian* that he spent too much time focusing on his next campaigns, staking out inoffensive positions when possible. "He views himself as a very pragmatic politician," says one, who asked to remain anonymous. "He was trying to make everyone happy, but the result was that no one was happy."

White's flexibility could be an asset on the Hill, allowing him to work with Democratic factions without alienating them. Still, he'll essentially be playing the game of Congress on hard mode. Without a floor vote, he'll have to rely on moral authority, close relationships with members on both sides of the aisle, and a whole lot of cajoling to get anything done. Norton was masterful in all of those areas, using her skills and experience to build support for statehood and win more prosaic battles, such as helping secure land owned by the federal government for the Wharf and other developments that city leaders championed. Over time, she earned the respect and trust of her peers and for decades sat on the House transportation and oversight committees, the latter of which deals directly with

White "better not go to Eleanor's office and measure the curtains, because that ain't gonna be your office. You're going to be in the basement without a window."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVY MAGES

issues related to the District.

White, warns DC political operative Chuck Thies, will have none of that working in his favor: "Not only are you a freshman, you're a freshman delegate. Seniority and relationships are everything in the House. . . . [He] better not go to Eleanor's office and measure the curtains, because that ain't gonna be your office. You're going to be in the basement without a window."

A New Approach?

After winning the primary, White took his first breather in a long time, going to Disneyland with his family. When he returned just before July 4, it was time to resume campaigning—but not in the District. Instead, White intends to visit Georgia, Pennsylvania, and other swing states and to organize volunteers from this area to do the same.

The plan, which White is tentatively calling "Defend DC" and has discussed with national Democratic officials, is still being hashed out. It has two goals. First, he wants to canvass for Democrats in swing districts. If the party can capture the House in the midterms—an increasingly likely outcome—Trump and other unfriendly Republicans will have a much harder time imposing their will on the city. White would potentially have more influence, too, with better committee assignments and a vote in the House session known as the Committee of the Whole, in which the 435 lawmakers can amend but can't pass legislation.

Second, White wants to educate voters in other places about DC's lack of congressional representation—and why it should matter to them. He believes today's tit-for-tat redistricting wars, with politicians in multiple states enacting nakedly partisan gerrymanders to give their parties an edge in Congress, are a golden opportunity to build national support for statehood. Almost 20 years ago, White watched his party fumble a generational opportunity to give the city a vote in the House. If Democrats could add that vote today—and two more in the Senate—would they once again balk? "The same Democrat in Iowa who is watching the redistricting fight, they should be watching the DC statehood fight and should be screaming to national Democratic leaders, 'You need to prioritize DC statehood,' " he says.

White's desire to make the District's democratic dilemma America's concern is arguably novel. It could be a tough sell with voters, at least compared with lowering gas and grocery bills. Given the ignominious history of previous statehood efforts, it can read as downright quixotic, especially coming from a mostly powerless congressional newbie with no national profile.

And yet: Facing their own obstacles and lacking much of a playbook, White's predecessors managed to do a lot with a little. "Everybody who's entered the role," says George Derek Musgrove, a University of Maryland historian who chronicles democracy in DC, "has had to reinvent it for their own purposes."

Civil-rights leader Walter Fauntroy took office in 1971, becoming the District's first congressional delegate since Reconstruction, and oversaw legislation that allowed residents to vote for the city's mayor and council. He also helped found the Congressional Black Caucus. When Norton won, she was criticized for focusing too much on her experience in national politics—one opponent called her "kind of aloof from the people of the city." She took office at a time of federal belt-tightening, with her reputation somewhat tarnished by a tax-filing controversy. But by the time she was reelected in 1994, all that was behind her. At the peak of her power, she was able to convince 1990s "Republican Revolution" leaders Newt Gingrich and Tom Davis to back a first-time-homebuyer credit for Washingtonians and a bill that helped repair the District's ailing finances by transferring its crushing pension, courts, and Medicaid costs to the feds.

Fauntroy and Norton proved that DC's delegate can wield real influence. White will have to figure out his own way—one suited for the remainder of the Trump era and for whatever comes next. "There is so much power in that seat," he says, "but there's no manual." W

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After celebrating his win, White plans to educate voters in other places about DC's lack of congressional representation—and why that should matter to them.

BEST CHEAP EATS

Our 60 favorite places to find a great meal for less than $25

By Ann Limpert, Jessica Sidman, Ike Allen, Cynthia Hacinli, and Sara Levine Rosenblum

Photograph by Birch Thomas
Food styling by Lisa Cherkasky



Nigerian-style spiced chicken with grilled corn at ***Spice Kitchen***

THESE DAYS, DINING WELL ON A BUDGET CAN BE A CHALLENGE.

Menu prices are up almost everywhere—you've probably gotten used to paying $20 for a sandwich or a single cocktail—and you have to look extra hard to find restaurants that are both very good values and very delicious. That's exactly why this felt like the perfect time to resurrect *Washingtonian's* once-annual guide to the area's best cheap eats. We scoured more than 200 places—from far-flung strip-mall dining rooms to old-school delis to TikTok-famous burger joints—to curate this list of our 60 favorites. And while our $25-per-person budget doesn't include drinks, tax, and tip like it used to, it does cover a satisfying, superlative meal.



A&J RESTAURANT

1319 ROCKVILLE PIKE, ROCKVILLE; 4316 MARKHAM ST., ANNANDALE

In the decades we've been visiting and revisiting these spare dim sum houses, not much has changed. The Taiwanese-style beef noodle soup and pot stickers are still big hits, but there's so much more to tick off the checklist-style menu: Braised pork on rice; thousand-layer pancake; bean-curd skin with mustard greens and soybeans; tofu with peanuts and cilantro; and cold noodles in A&J's special hot-and-sour sauce are all staples, and most cost less than $8.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BIRCH THOMAS; FOOD STYLING BY LISA CHERKASKY



A shareable spread of Chinese snacks and salads at ***A&J***

AREPA ZONE

MULTIPLE AREA LOCATIONS

Gabriela Febres and Ali Arellano founded Arepa Zone as a food truck more than a decade ago—now it has seven brick-and-mortar locations for a tasty Venezuelan lunch. It's hard to narrow the options for antojitos, but a good starting point is the pabellón arepa, filled with shredded beef, queso fresco, plantains, and black beans, or the sifrina, with chicken-avocado salad and shredded cheddar. Or try a sweet-corn cachapa with white cheese tucked inside.

BÁNH MÌ OI

6795 WILSON BLVD., FALLS CHURCH

There's a new reigning bánh mì in town. The signature sandwich at this Eden Center spot combines a traditional medley of deli meats—Viet bologna, ham, steamed pork belly, pâté—with a housemade aïoli, pickled veggies, jalapeño, and cilantro. Just as noteworthy is a Nashville hot chicken bánh mì, in which the bird is brined for 12 hours, double-fried, and tossed in a fiery wet rub. Best of all are the house-baked baguettes, airy as a cloud with a crackly exterior.



Beteseb's veggie platter is a rainbow of Ethiopian stews and salads.

BAO BEI

12015 ROCKVILLE PIKE, ROCKVILLE

Kevin Hsieh came on the scene during the pandemic, when he started serving Taiwanese bao out of a ghost kitchen. Word spread fast, and now he has a sunny cafe of his own, done up with cute murals and colorful dumpling squishies. His bao—fluffy housemade buns stuffed with soy-braised pork belly (or tofu), plus cilantro, ground peanut sugar, and pickled mustard greens—are still the thing to get. But we love his similarly accented rice bowls and, for dessert, brown-sugar buns.

BETESEB

8201 GEORGIA AVE., SILVER SPRING

The excitement of a sizzling fajita platter is something normally reserved for Tex-Mex places. But at this Ethiopian dining room, you'll feel it when you order the crispy beef tibs, a fry-up of lean steak, onion, tomato, peppers, rosemary, and clarified butter that a server brings out on a searing cast-iron skillet. Vegetable dishes such as lentils and collard greens are nicely rendered, too. If you wanted to pick one of the area's many excellent Ethiopian places to make your regular joint, this would be a very good choice.

BOOGY & PEEL

1 DUPONT CIR., NW

This Dupont dining room fuses two of our favorite things: sandwiches and pizza. There are thin, perfectly baked pies inspired by Italian subs, Big Macs, and Reubens. All very tasty, but we're just as enamored with the simpler pizzas, whether pepperoni strewn with fiery salsa macha and honey or just plain cheese. Pregame with wings and pimiento cheese, and take advantage of the place's daily happy hour—especially if you're into natural wine—and Wednesday half-price pizza deal.

CAMBA CAFE

7177 LEE HWY., FALLS CHURCH

This is one of the area's most regionally specific restaurants, serving food from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, eastern Bolivia's economic hub. The pastry case is filled with empanadas de arroz (squishy patties made from rice, yuca, and cheese, all sandwiched in a banana leaf) and cuñapes (crisp, cheesy rolls made with yuca flour, almost identical to Brazilian pão de queijo). There's also a full menu of hearty mains such as majadito, a jambalaya-like toasted-rice dish flecked with salted beef and topped with yuca, plantains, and a fried egg.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF BETESEB AND CHAIA BY SCOTT SUCHMAN; CHAY BY JUDY PAN

CHAIA

3207 GRACE ST., NW; 615 I ST., NW

A certain kind of foodie might be wary of a (mostly) vegetarian taco place in Georgetown, but Chaia—which started at a DC farmers market and now has a second location in Penn Quarter—is hard to fault. Bettina Stern, Suzanne Simon, and their kitchen team fashion reliably tasty, balanced taco fillings out of combinations such as creamy kale with potato and pepper jack, or seasonal veggies like asparagus with spring garlic, whipped goat cheese, and sweet-pepper relish. One big, recent addition to the lineup: a chicken taco.

CHARGA GRILL

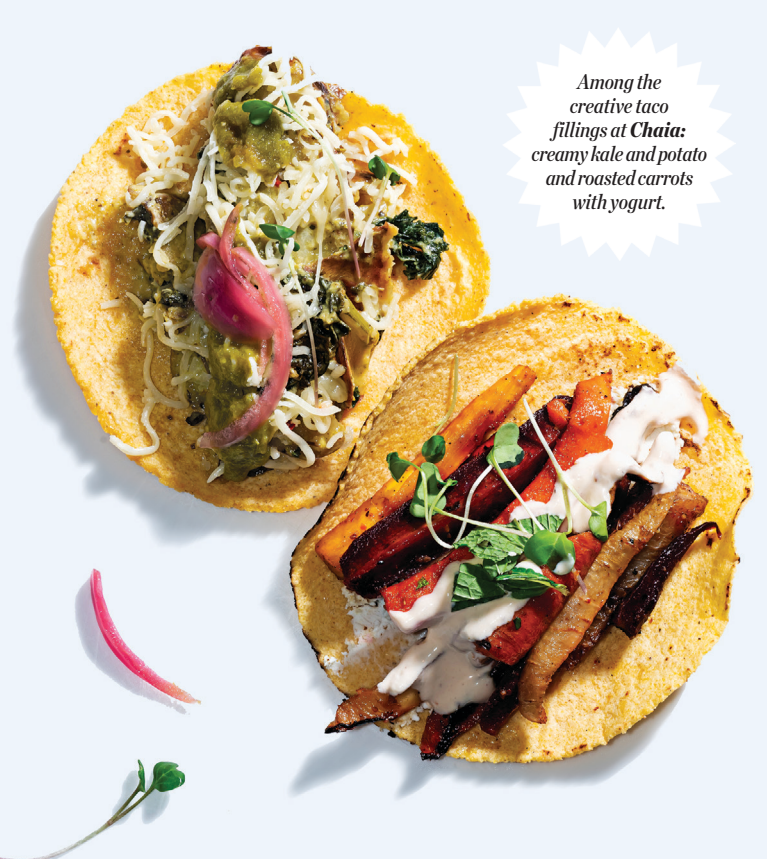
5151 LANGSTON BLVD., ARLINGTON

The menu at this strip-mall joint is a baffling sprawl of fried-chicken sandwiches, kebab platters, and Nepali-style dumplings. But the main attraction is its whole chicken. The birds come in different styles, and the signature is the skinless Pakistani-style "charga," which is steamed, marinated with yogurt and house-ground spices, and flash-fried. It's finished off with slivered red onion and chaat masala. Pair it with a wide-ranging choice of sides such as biryani rice, curried chickpeas, or okra masala.

CHAY

6351 COLUMBIA PIKE, FALLS CHURCH

This Vietnamese standout serves a stellar spicy lemongrass beef noodle soup—minus the beef. Instead, chef Lan Tran uses vegan beef, soy ham, tofu, and vegetables to create a rich, comforting bowl. It's one of many dishes on the all-vegetarian/vegan menu that will convert faux-meat skeptics into true believers. Try the "clam" dip made with soy protein, a convincing shaky "beef," and a bubbling clay pot of caramelized "fish" and ginger.



Among the creative taco fillings at ***Chaia:*** *creamy kale and potato and roasted carrots with yogurt.*

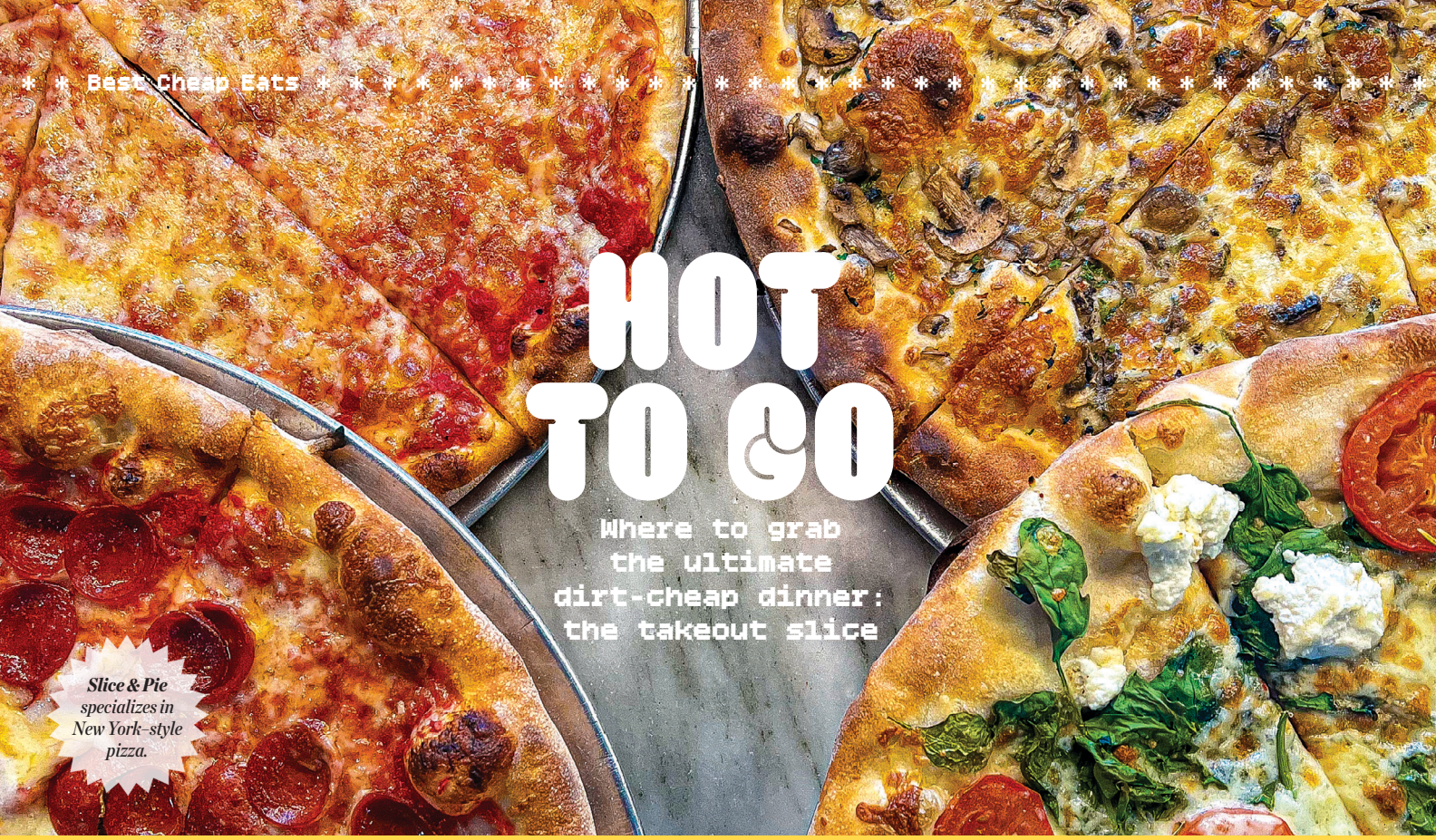


A vermicelli platter with vegan "sausage" and Vietnamese "ham" at ***Chay***

CHIKO

CAPITOL HILL, DUPONT CIRCLE, SHIRLINGTON, STERLING

Disguised as a simple fast-casual bowl place with a heavy emphasis on delivery, this Chinese/Korean concept—from the team behind Anju—is actually something far more special. Witness the soy-glazing and furikake-buttering treatment the kitchen gives to sliced brisket smoked by the barbecue experts at 2Fifty, or the orange chicken with candied mandarins and crispy garlic, which may be the best version of the takeout classic we've ever tried.



HOT TO GO

Where to grab the ultimate dirt-cheap dinner: the takeout slice

Slice & Pie specializes in New York–style pizza.

ANDY'S PIZZA

Multiple area locations

THE PLACE:
Expansion hasn't hurt Andy Brown's beloved local chain, now with 14 locations that include breweries, malls, and his own shops.

STYLE:
Classic New York, with a fantastic crust born of 72-hour-fermented dough, plus a mix of mozz and provolone and a dusting of Reggiano Parmesan.

PRICE: $4.50.

BEST SLICE:
Sausage and bell peppers.

DELLA BARBA

1382 E. Capitol St., NE

THE PLACE:
Joey Barber's petite neighborhood pizzeria/cafe sits near Capitol Hill's Lincoln Park.

STYLE:
Barber is known for his mastery of several styles, including NYC, Chicago deep dish, and Detroit. His slices, though, are nonna-inspired, with a thick, olive-oily crust, fresh and shredded mozzarella, and basil leaves.

PRICE: $6.

BEST SLICE:
Cheese (we also have a soft spot for the mini versions of his whole Chicago pies).

RED HOUND

7050 Carroll Ave., Takoma Park

THE PLACE:
A tiny downtown Takoma Park carry-out from two alums of the Shaw bread destination Seylou Bakery.

STYLE:
Roman-meets-grandma style (think burnished focaccia) made with locally milled flour and seasonal veggies.

PRICE: $4.50 to $5.

BEST SLICE:
You can always get a rectangle Margherita slice, but look for the ever-changing specials, such as one with leeks, goat cheese, and salsa verde.

SLICE & PIE

2221 14th St., NW; 1309 Fifth St., NE; 1750 H St., NW

THE PLACE:
Naples native Giulio Adriani, who has won several international pizza competitions, launched his 14th Street pizzeria/bar in 2022. It quickly blossomed, and a location at the Parks at Walter Reed opens in early August.

STYLE:
Big, floppy New York slices and thicker Detroit squares liberally laden with tangy tomato sauce.

PRICE: $4 to $5.50.

BEST SLICE:
You can't go wrong with pepperoni, but watch for Adriani's collabs with other chefs.

SONNY'S PIZZA

3120 Georgia Ave., NW

THE PLACE:
A laid-back Park View pizzeria and back-yard bar that's as obsessed with natural wine as it is with pizza.

STYLE:
Neo-Sicilian—puffy, crisp-bottomed crusts loaded with shredded mozzarella and red sauce and cut into squares.

PRICE: $4.75 to $5.

BEST SLICE:
Cheese pizza topped with a fistful of arugula and drizzled with chili oil.

VACE

3315 Connecticut Ave., NW; 4705 Miller Ave., Bethesda

THE PLACE:
This pair of Italian groceries brimming with imported goods and frozen pastas turns 50 this year.

STYLE:
Vace's signature: cheese is baked into the thin crust, then topped with sauce.

PRICE: $2.50(!).

BEST SLICE:
A tie between plain cheese and white pizza with onions.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SLICE & PIE

DESI BREAKFAST CLUB

3065 CENTREVILLE RD., HERNDON

You could have French toast or pancakes, but eating your way through the Pakistani side of this all-day breakfast menu is much more gratifying. Go for paratha wraps filled with ground meat or long-cooked stews such as tangy chickpea curry and velvety haleem with shredded chicken and lentils. Our desert-island pick? A tossup between sweet and savory: a bowl of torn, flaky flatbread with melted butter and sugar or a crepe-like paratha enfolding a spiced omelet to slather with eggplant chutney.

EGGHOLIC

1900 M ST., NW; 13951 METROTECH DR., CHANTILLY

Many of the downtown DC professionals who work within lunching distance of Eggholic seem unsure what to make of it: an egg-focused Indian restaurant that isn't open for breakfast. It's worth doing a little research, though. This place and its Chantilly sibling are devoted to re-creating a specific genre of eggy snacks served on the streets of Gujarat. The masala-and-cheese topped katori are essentially leveled-up deviled eggs, and gotalo tastes something like shakshuka on steroids. Bombay grilled sandwiches are a nice vegetarian option, too—eggs aren't usually considered vegetarian in India.

EL VIEJO CENTRAL AMERICAN KITCHEN

9224 WARREN ST., SILVER SPRING

This small cafe is two things at once: a design-forward creative outlet for proprietor Henry Blanco and an affordable workaday pupusa joint for the community. Pupusas—$3 a pop—are some of the best around, and the Blanco family also incorporates dishes from El Salvador's neighbors, such as Guatemalan chuchitos (chicken tamales) and a mighty Nicaraguan-style fritanga platter with carne asada, long plantain chips, and fried cheese.

FAVA POT

1817 M ST., NW ; 7393 LEE HWY., FALLS CHURCH; 1624 BORO PL., McLEAN

Koshari is perhaps the most famous Egyptian comfort food, and chef Dina Daniel makes a craveable rendition loaded with rice, macaroni, lentils, chickpeas, crisp shallots, and a zesty tomato sauce. But Fava Pot has many more comforts to explore: fava-bean falafel; chicken kofta with béchamel; feta pies encrusted in za'atar; and eggplant-and-ground-beef moussaka studded with raisins.

HABESHA MARKET

1919 NINTH ST., NW

DC's most spartan, rough-and-ready Ethiopian restaurant is also one of its best. Habesha stays open till 11 to serve U Street revelers, and you won't find doting service or elaborate coffee ceremonies here. What you will encounter is the Taste of Habesha platter, featuring spicy lentils, yellow split peas, collards with beef, chickpea-flour shiro, salad, cabbage, and two rich stews—doro wat and ground-beef-based menchet abesh—all on one crowded injera. Dinner for at least three for $35.

HAIFA GRILL

3541 CARLIN SPRINGS RD., FALLS CHURCH

The first thing to note at this Palestinian shawarma spot is the shrak flatbread, nearly large enough to swaddle an infant. It's slathered with tahini and garlic sauce (we add hot sauce), then heaped with juicy beef or chicken carved from the spinning rotisserie. Sumac onions, lettuce, pickles, tomatoes, and cucumbers are bundled in, too, creating a sandwich so hefty it feels like a two-for-one deal.



*A Nicaraguan feast at **El Viejo:** grilled chicken, carne asada, fried cheese, plantains, and more*

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVY MAGES

* * Best Cheap Eats * * *

JON'S JOINT

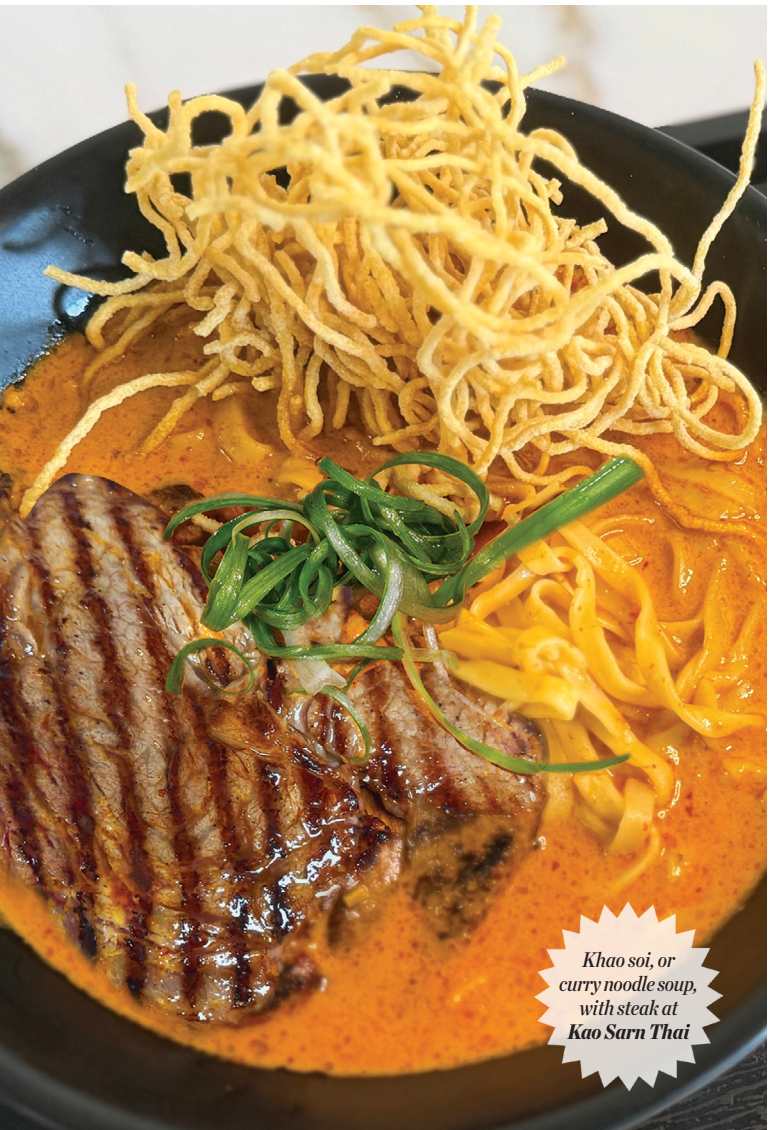
DOWNTOWN DC, ALEXANDRIA, BALLSTON, STERLING

The superlative smash burgers at this quickly growing local chainlet start with halal beef, butchered and ground in-house, then crisped into thin saucers on the grill. Potato buns can barely contain the caramelized patties (choose one, two, or three), oozing with American cheese and special sauce. You can't go wrong ordering the Jon's Classic, with onion, tomato, lettuce, and pickles, but we're suckers for the jalapeño burger, with pickled peppers, pepper jack, and grilled onions.

KAO SARN THAI STREET FOOD

6795 WILSON BLVD., FALLS CHURCH

Chef/owner Arin Lapakulchai's tiny Thai storefront is hidden in the Eden Center's indoor mall. Her wondrous take on khao soi, the curry soup gilded with crunchy noodles, is finished with pickled mustard greens and shallots. Other musts include eggplant stir-fried with ground pork and Thai basil; crispy pork belly with Chinese broccoli; and boat noodle soup, packed with pork rinds, meatballs, sprouts, and basil in an intense, blood-enhanced broth. "American spicy" will be hot enough for most; "Thai spicy" here is truly incendiary.



Khao soi, or curry noodle soup, with steak at ***Kao Sarn Thai***



Ground-beef kebabs with chickpeas, rice, and flatbread at ***Khan Kabob***

KEREN

1780 FLORIDA AVE., NW

This 40-year-old Eritrean joint in Adams Morgan was down for the count for two years after a kitchen fire. But following a remodel, it made a triumphant return late last year. All-day breakfast is still a major draw, centered on ful (slow-cooked fava-bean mash topped with bright tomatoes, jalapeños, and yogurt); flaxseed silsi (tomato sauce infused with the fiber-rich superfood); and kicha (torn flatbread fried in clarified butter).

KHAN KABOB HOUSE

4229 LAFAYETTE CENTER DR., CHANTILLY

Well-marinated and beautifully grilled kebabs are the mainstay at this Indian Pakistani eatery. Think glistening skewers of lamb tenderloin, juicy chicken, or oniony ground sirloin—sided with fluffy basmati, a mini salad, and shatteringly crisp Pakistani naan. A lineup of daily specials yields more treasures: Thursday's chicken keema and Friday's eggplant with potato are especially fine. Sides such as crunchy vegetable pakoras and soulful chickpea stew round out things. The signature karahis—chili-forward stews cooked in a wok-like pan—stretch the limits of our budget. They're sized for two but work well for groups.

KUYA JA'S LECHON BELLY

5268 NICHOLSON LN., ROCKVILLE

The titular Cebu-style crispy roast pork at Javier Fernandez's Filipino restaurant is actually just one of several destination-worthy items on the menu, which also includes unimpeachable lumpia (spring rolls) and spiced adobo-glazed wings. Struggling to choose? Opt for the "fully stacked" combo: slow-roasted crispy pork belly, garlic rice, coins of sweet longanisa sausage, a fried egg, and the Filipino pickle known as atsara.

LA TEJANA

3211 MOUNT PLEASANT ST., NW

This tiny Mount Pleasant taqueria serves just one thing: breakfast tacos that are worth crossing state lines for. Housemade flour tortillas swaddle fluffy scrambled eggs with refried beans, crispy potatoes, and queso made the proper Texas way, with Velveeta. Add on meats such as house-cured chorizo, bacon, or—best of all—chopped brisket that's smoked by the barbecue pros at 2Fifty. Don't forget to throw in the charred-tomato salsa and cilantro crema served on the side.

LOS HERMANOS AND MECHO'S DOMINICAN KITCHEN

1428 PARK RD., NW; 2450 MARKET ST., NE

DC's Dominican food scene would be nowhere without twin brothers Aris and Raymond Compres, who own both the humble lunch counter Los Hermanos in Columbia Heights and the more expansive Mecho's in an out-of-the-way Northeast DC shopping center. Both are great places for the time-honored Dominican—and New York City—tradition of pointing at various fried and stewed meats to be scooped over beans and rice from the steam table. For a more elaborate dinner and a beer, head to Mecho's.

MAKEDA

516 VAN DORN ST., ALEXANDRIA

Most evenings, this sleek strip-mall eatery hosts live jazz and traditional Ethiopian music, providing a lovely soundtrack for the wonderful East African cooking coming out of the kitchen. Each colorful lentil variety, each beefy entrée, each stewed vegetable gets its own distinctive preparation. Plus, you've got your choice between deep-brown imported injera made from 100 percent teff flour and the supple locally prepared stuff with wheat mixed in.



Lechon kawali, or crispy pork belly, is one of the star offerings at ***Kuya Ja's Lechon Belly.***



La Tejana uses housemade flour tortillas for its excellent breakfast tacos.

MANDALAY

930 BONIFANT ST., SILVER SPRING

Salads rule at this Burmese eatery—we love the fermented tea leaf with ribbons of green-tea-flecked cabbage, toasted garlic, and fish sauce. Ginger salad with shaved carrots and cabbage is even more intense. Spicy pickled-mango curry with pork or chicken is wonderfully complex, while a simpler onion-based curry mates well with proteins, tofu, or vegetables. If you're craving comfort, stir-fried noodles with a shower of spring onion and a fried egg on top is all you need.

MANIFEST BREAD

6208 RHODE ISLAND AVE., RIVERDALE PARK

It started as a cult bakery business selling sourdough to some of DC's top chefs. But since 2023, Manifest has been a winning neighborhood restaurant in its own right. Riverdale Park locals stop in at lunch for apple and cheddar on a baguette or a muffuletta on sesame focaccia. At dinner, the menu is centered around wonderfully charred pizzas with toppings like roasted broccoli, fontina, and garlic fonduta.

MARUFUJI JAPANESE MARKET

8520 LEESBURG PIKE, VIENNA

This new Japanese grocery store is a must-visit for sushi-grade fish, specialty ingredients, and beauty products, but don't sleep on the cafe in back. There you'll find udon soup in a lightly sweet dashi—the springy noodles are hand-stretched in Okayama, Japan—alongside hearty carrot-and-potato-studded curry with rice and your choice of katsu. Meanwhile, directly imported fish is showcased in hand rolls and eye-catching chirashi bowls.



*Pop into **Manifest Bread** for a freshly baked cookie or bialy.*

PHOTOGRAPH OF KUYA JA COURTESY OF RESTAURANT; LA TEJANA BY JASON GARZA; MANIFEST BREAD BY LAURA WHITFIELD



Chicago dogs with mustard, tomatoes, pickles, and sport peppers at ***Marv's Dogs***

MARV'S DOGS

4936 WISCONSIN AVE., NW

DC can be a tough place for a homesick Chicagoan, at least on the food front. Enter this cute mint-green hot-dog shop from the owners of Cork Wine Bar and Market. The menu's star is the classic Chicago dog: an all-beef frank carefully laden with sliced tomatoes, sport peppers, pickle spears, celery salt, mustard, and zingy relish. Bookend it—and maybe a chili dog, too—with a '90s arcade game downstairs and the best vanilla soft-serve in the city.

MÉLANGE FOODS

2108 EIGHTH ST., NW

Former fine-dining chef Elias Taddesse showcases three masterful menus—centered around burgers, fried chicken, and tacos—at this arty indoor-outdoor hangout right by the 9:30 Club. Craving a cheeseburger? It's tough to beat the dry-aged one here, done up with brown-butter aïoli and pickled onions. Taddesse cleverly weaves Ethiopian ingredients into his fried-chicken menu, spicing buttermilk-brined birds with berbere and topping fabulous mac and cheese with injera crumbles. When it comes to tacos, it's all about the crunchy fried cod on housemade corn tortillas.

MELT GOURMET CHEESEBURGERS

525 EAST MARKET ST., LEESBURG

This is one of the rare burger joints worth driving out of your way for. Thick house-ground aged-beef patties come on airy, freshly baked buns in a dizzying number of styles, from a fire-roasted-green-chile cheeseburger to an applewood-bacon-and-Gorgonzola version. A surprise hit is the Paris Burger, with a smear of sweet roasted garlic, Dijon mustard, balsamic-glazed onions, and thick slabs of Brie. Don't miss the balsamic-drizzled onion rings or sweet-potato fries with a side of marshmallow fluff.

NHA TRANG

6757 WILSON BLVD., FALLS CHURCH

This Eden Center gem is hidden inside the sprawling Vietnamese shopping center's interior mall. A perfect meal starts with the barbecue pork sausage rolls—a meaty take on summer rolls packed with herbs and crispy shallots. The kitchen excels at comfort food like ground-pork congee, which gets better and better as the flavors meld. (It's even more delicious the next day for breakfast.) Clay pots boast a layer of gorgeous, paella-like caramelized rice, best scooped up with loads of fresh seafood and vegetables.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SALTBRIDGE STRATEGIES

PHO GA VANG

6767 WILSON BLVD., FALLS CHURCH

Pho ga (chicken pho) too often tastes like a watered-down version of its beefy sibling—but not here. This popular Eden Center soup spot specializes in the poultry version of "Vietnamese penicillin," turning out a broth that's rich and intoxicating. The classic bowl is topped with juicy, skin-on chicken, though beef also makes an appearance on the menu. (We love the thinly sliced, tender brisket.) The tight menu is all about pho, but the restaurant shares space with a colorful boba joint that makes fun dessert drinks like toasted-brown-sugar boba milk.

PHO THIN

7263 ARLINGTON BLVD., FALLS CHURCH

This legendary Hanoi pho shop recently landed in Falls Church, where it quickly drew crowds and hype. The restaurant is famous for the garlicky wok-seared rib eye that fills its scallion-topped bowls. While many other pho broths in our area lean sweet with a distinct star-anise flavor, this one is deeply savory with a hint of roasted garlic. And instead of thin, stringy rice noodles, the ones here are wide with just the right amount of chew. Load up on the sweet pickled raw garlic that comes as a table condiment.

RAVI KABOB HOUSE

305 N. GLEBE RD., ARLINGTON

For nearly three decades, this Pakistani joint has remained one of the region's go-tos for charcoal-grilled kebabs. Styrofoam plates on plastic trays come heaped with tender, charred chicken and ground beef, plus rice, salad, curried chickpeas, yogurt sauce, and Frisbee-size disks of bread tandoor-baked to order. From adjoining Ravi Chatkhara, try the fiery karahi curries sized for two (or more), with bone-in chunks of meat and slivers of ginger.

RICE PAPER

6775 WILSON BLVD., FALLS CHURCH

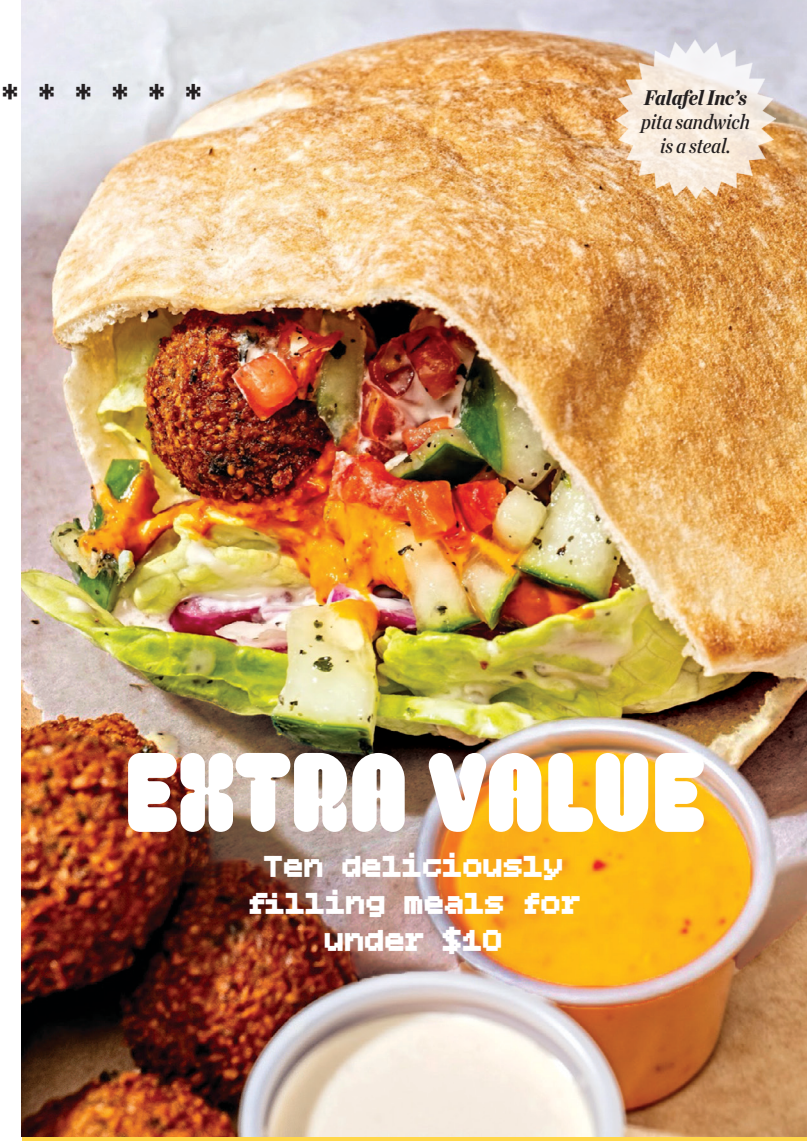
Even for lunch on a random Tuesday, crowds are jockeying for tables at this Eden Center standby. The sprawling Vietnamese menu provides a lot to keep fans coming back, starting with spiced ground beef wrapped in grape leaves and sweet lacquered roasted quail. Other favorites include an expertly crisped bánh xèo crepe stuffed with shrimp, pork, and mung beans or a generous combo platter of grilled meats and seafood ready to wrap with thin vermicelli patties, lettuce, herbs, and rice paper.

RUAN THAI

11407 AMHERST AVE., WHEATON

Staying power matters, and this humble storefront has been ladling up gorgeous curries from family recipes for more than 25 years. Red curry with duck and a shrimp-studded yellow-curry stir-fry are particularly fine. Fried watercress with seafood and cashews is a textural thrill, and skewers of caramelized pork get extra punch from herb-flecked vinegar. But the bowl everyone will be fighting for: a heap of fermented pork with red onion, peanuts, and crunchy rice.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF FALAFEL INC



Falafel Inc's pita sandwich is a steal.

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1323 Fourth St., NE

$9.95
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Laurel and Silver Spring

$8.99
Avgolemono soup at the Greek Deli
1120 19th St., NW

$7.50
Cold-cut bánh mì at Bánh Mì D.C. Sandwich
3103 Graham Rd., Falls Church

$7
Chilito—a flour tortilla stuffed with chili and cheddar—at Meats & Foods
247 Florida Ave., NW

$6.99
Genoa-salami-and-provolone sub at A. Litteri
517 Morse St., NE

$6.50
One-quarter rotisserie chicken at Peruvian Brothers
Capitol Hill, Union Market District, and Crystal City

$5.49
Falafel sandwich at Falafel Inc
Multiple area locations

$4.50
"Good Morning" breakfast sandwich—eggs, cheese, and a choice of meat—at Murry & Paul's
3513 12th St., NE

$4
Happy-hour hot dog—available daily—at Last Call
1301 Fourth St., NE

SAINTS PARADISE CAFETERIA

601 M ST., NW

There will never be anywhere else in DC quite like this decades-old lunch counter in a light-filled side room of the United House of Prayer for All People, in Shaw. Try the fried whiting, the fried chicken, the meatloaf, the smothered pork chops, the collards, the cakes, or really anything that looks good from the ever-shifting steam table. The restaurant is as much an institution as the place of worship that houses it.

SAN PANCHO

7056 CARROLL AVE., TAKOMA PARK

Wildly popular with Takoma locals since it opened in 2024, San Pancho is a tribute to the influential Cal-Mex cuisine of San Francisco's Mission district— "Pancho" is a classic nickname for Francisco. Super burritos are stuffed into slightly translucent, unctuous Sonoran flour tortillas. Salsas are deeply flavorful. Even the cocktails and creative coffee drinks are worth a shout-out.

SARDI'S PERUVIAN CHICKEN

MULTIPLE MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA LOCATIONS

Kids' soccer teams after a game, UMD students, immigrant families—they all gather on busy evenings at the many locations of this Peruvian-chicken chain, founded by a Greek family 20 years back. Expect deeply burnished, fall-apart charbroiled birds, plus unexpected sides like deep-fried Brussels sprouts alongside the typical fried yuca and rice and beans. The fridge is stocked with two-liter bottles of Inca Kola, a goldenrod-colored DC-area takeout staple.



*Grilled chicken with rice and beans at **Sardi's** Peruvian Chicken*



***Sushi Hachi** serves its sashimi with accents such as daikon ginger and yuzu tobiko.*

SPICE KITCHEN

3124 QUEENS CHAPEL RD., HYATTSVILLE; 15606 EMERALD WAY, BOWIE

These colorful eateries come off like the Chipotle of Nigerian food, and that's exactly what owner Olumide Shokunbi wants them to become. But his places pay more attention to detail than most fast-casual chains do: Witness the grill-blackened suya salmon, sprinkled with red onions and an addictive seasoning powder imported from northern Nigeria, or even the grilled corn on the cob, slathered in spicy honey.

PHOTOGRAPH OF SARDI'S PERUVIAN CHICKEN BY SCOTT SUCHMAN



PHOTOGRAPH OF SUSHI HACHI COURTESY OF LEADING DC

SUSHI HACHI

735 EIGHTH ST., SE

Affordable, high-quality sushi that doesn't involve a happy hour isn't a pipe dream at this Barracks Row dining room. Each night, you'll find $8 rolls filled with, say, hamachi, fried green beans, and jalapeño, or eel, crunchy shrimp, and avocado. Want to splurge—but still stay within our $25 budget? Order thin slices of prime beef sizzling on a hot stone and sprinkled with truffle salt.

TAQUERIA HABANERO

3710 14TH ST., NW; 670 RHODE ISLAND AVE., NE; 7410 BALTIMORE AVE., COLLEGE PARK

The high-quality housemade corn tortillas at these family-run Mexican places elevate every taco to the point that it's hard to go wrong—whether classic al pastor with pineapple; goat barbacoa; or chicken tinga. Worth your time, too: grilled octopus and cactus with avocado.



The generous tlayuda at ***Taqueria Xochi****—a tortilla piled with cactus, refried beans, melty cheese, and more*

TAQUERIA SABOR MIXTECO

2462 ENNALLS AVE., SILVER SPRING

Maybe you remember Mixtec, a pioneer of serious Mexican cooking in DC that closed in 2014 after 40 years in Adams Morgan. This taqueria is the project of a Mixtec veteran, Juan Solano, with help from Apolinar Cervantes and Marisol Gonzales. Oaxacan dishes such as a pizza-size tlayuda—a crispy tortilla topped with beans, chorizo, and more—and the hearty pork-and-potato stew called chileajo really shine. We're also fans of the alambre: The melty mix of grilled meat, poblanos, onions, and cheese becomes a make-your-own-taco experience.

TAQUERIA XOCHI

DOWNTOWN DC, NAVY YARD, U STREET, CRYSTAL CITY

Having grown to four locations since it opened in 2020, Taqueria Xochi has become one of DC's go-to Mexican spots. Diners certainly post a lot of pictures of the birria online—it's solid—but don't forget the cemita, Puebla's entry in the pantheon of the world's great sandwiches. A chicken-milanesa cutlet is stacked on a seeded roll with onion, tomato, strands of queso Oaxaca, smoky chipotles in adobo, pickled jalapeño, and a liberal schmear of avocado.

TEMPO SHACK

804 13TH ST., NE

If you're walking down H Street after a couple of drinks, Tempo Shack feels like an improbable apparition: a small takeout window from which Dipesh Acharya dispenses uncompromising Himalayan street food late into the night. The Nepali dumplings called momos are the one essential here (try the water-buffalo version, stir-fried with a vibrant chili glaze) but chow mein and spiced meat or veggie skewers are good options, too.

THAI SQUARE

3217 COLUMBIA PIKE, ARLINGTON

Colorful boxes of Thai bubblegum line the walls of this eatery, a longtime favorite of Thai expats. Spot-on classics, sometimes with a dash of the unexpected, are what keeps customers loyal. Think glossy pad see ew noodles; expertly fried morsels of duck in a fiery sauce; a jumble of spicy shrimp tossed with lemongrass, scallions, and cilantro; and a bowl of garlicky Chinese broccoli strewn with pork belly.

PHOTOGRAPH BY REY LOPEZ



*The Nepali spot **Tempo Shack** serves tasty skewers, chow mein, and momos.*

323 DHABA EXPRESS

20800 PIDGEON HILL DR., STERLING

Jasdeep Singh and his wife, Sandeep Kaur, first opened a West Virginia truck stop to serve the large community of intercity truckers who hail from their native Punjab. Soon after, they expanded to this Sterling cafe, which serves vegetarian Indian fare as hearty as you'd expect for a truck stop: rich curries made with chickpeas, dal, and mustard greens, all topped with plenty of ghee, plus a full menu of freshly baked flatbreads such as the potato-stuffed, coriander-studded Amritsari kulcha.

TRIPPY TACOS

12134 GEORGIA AVE., SILVER SPRING

The birria tacos at this food truck turned storefront are some of the best around, and the rich, red-chili-laced stew lends star power to other plates, such as birria ramen or the popular Mexican street snack called mulitas (tortillas filled with birria and cheese and griddled till crisp). Flour and corn tortillas, both made in-house, shine in tacos with fillings of tender lengua and al pastor pork and in the baleada sencilla, a flour tortilla overflowing with egg, beans, cheese, avocado, and crema.

TRUONG TIEN

6763 WILSON BLVD., FALLS CHURCH

The spicy lemongrass beef noodle soup, with its cure-all broth and craggy meatballs, is what keeps us coming back again and again to this transportive Vietnamese restaurant tucked into the depths of the Eden Center mall. The menu is also full of lesser-seen specialties from central Vietnam's Hue province, including banana-leaf-wrapped tapioca dumplings and fried and steamed rice cakes stuffed with tiny shrimp.



*Sugary churros at **Trippy Tacos***

PHOTOGRAPH OF TEMPO SHACK BY EVY MAGES; TRIPPY TACOS COURTESY OF RESTAURANT



2FIFTY

414 K ST., NW; 4700 RIVERDALE RD., RIVERDALE PARK

There's more than delicious—but pricey—Wagyu and prime brisket at these Texas-style barbecue destinations. Thickly sliced smoked turkey puts all others in the shade. Pork ribs are tender and peppery, while pulled pork has all the hallmarks of meat smoked nice and slow. Don't overlook such daily specials as the Monday brisket burger or sides like mustardy potato salad, crunchy slaw, and beans with nubbins of brisket.

UPSTATE FTW

1314 U ST., NW

Chiko/Anju cofounder Scott Drewno switches his attention from Korean cooking to his native upstate New York's cuisine on this menu, served inside the U Street bar Sport & Social. Classic Buffalo wings are a thing of beauty—fried to order so they arrive hot and crispy, then sided with chunky blue-cheese dressing—and the creamy Buffalo-chicken dip is just as delicious. Chili dogs are made with snappy Zweigle's franks. Our main advice: Bring friends. Order a French-bread pizza here and you'll get an entire, full-size split baguette.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SOPHIE MACALUSO



*Find the area's best barbecue—sausages, ribs, turkey, and more—at **2Fifty**.*

YELLOW

417 MORSE ST., NE; 1524 WISCONSIN AVE., NW

Chef Michael Rafidi's fine-dining Palestinian restaurant, Albi, and his French/Middle Eastern bistro, La' Shukran, are two of the most sought-after reservations in town. But you can breeze in for a far more affordable meal at these Levantine cafes. The perfect morning is a za'atar-encrusted croissant filled with labneh alongside a coconut-cardamom iced coffee, while lunch brings wood-fired pita sandwiches stuffed with BBQ lamb shoulder or harissa cauliflower.

YU NOODLES

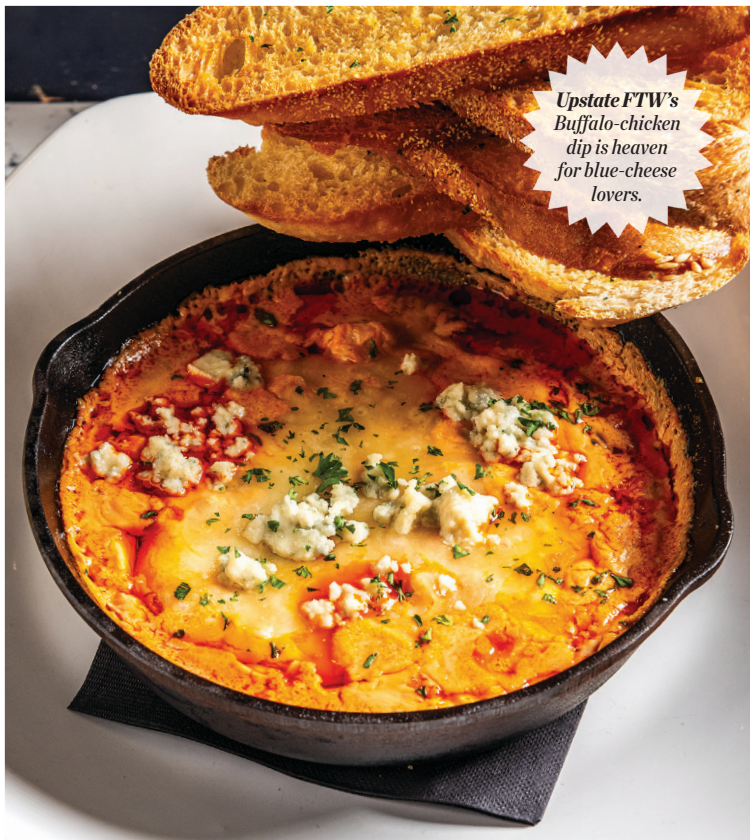
MULTIPLE AREA LOCATIONS

This fast-growing local chain is devoted to the spicy street food of Chongqing and to all things noodle (the ones here are made in-house). We go for yibin, spicy dry noodles with minced pork and crushed peanuts; an elixir-like soup of flounder, sour pickled cabbage, and noodles; colorful "rainbow" soup dumplings; and wontons in fiery oil—even better topped with a fried egg. Fruity boba drinks are the perfect foil to the bold, often numbing, tastes.

Z&Z MANOUSHE BAKERY

1111 NELSON ST., ROCKVILLE

Yes, the manoushe—thin flatbreads, often described as the Levantine version of pizza—emerge from the ovens here with the blistery bubbles you'll find on a great Neapolitan pie. But mostly, the similarities end there. Our favorite rendition, the "Lebanese bride," is topped with a cooling mix of labneh, chopped tomatoes and cucumbers, and plenty of fresh herbs. Or opt for the "cocktail," a flatbread with molten cheese on one side and a thick paving of za'atar on the other. (The owners run a company that specializes in the spice blend.) W



***Upstate FTW's** Buffalo-chicken dip is heaven for blue-cheese lovers.*

VIT COEL TOFU (LIGHTHOUSE TOFU)

4121 CHATELAIN RD., ANNANDALE

Korean staples such as bibim bap and bulgogi are solid at this cozy Annandale fixture, but the real draw is the unparalleled sundubu-jjigae (tofu stew). Every bubbling pot stars fresh, silky tofu, though the flavors are distinct: The beef-and-kimchi bowl is tangy and spicy, while the seafood pot is subtle and comforting, hiding plump mussels and head-on shrimp beneath the surface. Crack an egg immediately into the cauldron for even more depth and richness. A round of delicate pan-fried vegetable dumplings makes a satisfying snack while you wait for these made-to-order masterpieces.

PHOTOGRAPH OF UPSTATE FTW BY REY LOPEZ



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YouGov Profiles March 2020.

LIFE & TRAVEL



QUIRKY QUESTS
Meet these adorable animals at Black Barn Alpacas. For more unconventional day trips, turn the page.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BLACK BARN ALPACAS



"Foamhenge" at Cox Farms

Stranger Things

Roadside dinosaurs, a fairy-tale village, and cuddly alpacas—these nearby outings are a chance to explore the wild, weird, and whimsical

By Daniella Byck

Explore Our Local Stonehenge

England's Neolithic structures have a duplicate at **Cox Farms** *(15621 Braddock Rd., Centreville)*. Dubbed Foamhenge, the replica is made of—you guessed it—Styrofoam, painted to look like its stone inspiration. It's the magnum opus of Mark Cline, a Virginia artist whose work can be found at other attractions on this list, such as Dinosaur Land and the Enchanted Forest. Tickets for the farm's fall festival and Field of Fears include access to the landmark, so you can turn your Foamhenge excursion into a day of autumnal activities or a night of Halloween horrors.

Drive time from DC: 40 minutes

Stumble Into a Storybook

Kids can pet goats at **Clark's Elioak Farm** *(10500 Clarksville Pike, Ellicott City)*, but the true fantasy is in the Enchanted Forest, a village of colorful, life-size structures torn from fairy tales and nursery rhymes. Step through the archway of the castle manned by a guitar-wielding dragon to enter the "neighborhood," where you'll find homes belonging to the Three Bears and the Three Little Pigs, plus the Old Woman's Shoe. For more magic, take the path into the forest, where wanderers are encouraged to look down and search for fairies and sprite houses.

Drive time from DC: 50 minutes

PHOTOGRAPH BY SEANA SHUCHART PHOTOGRAPHY



Fairy Forest at Clark's Elioak Farm

Romp Around Dinosaurs

Whatever extinction event came for the dinosaurs 66 million years ago somehow missed this roadside sliver just outside Winchester, Virginia. More than 55 fiberglass dinosaurs—and inexplicably, King Kong—make up **Dinosaur Land** *(3848 Stonewall Jackson Hwy., White Post)*. The quirky destination also features a massive shark, woolly mammoth, and octopus for photo-ops with a retro feel. There are no animatronics or high-tech happenings here—just good old-fashioned road-trip kitsch. Fans of the Mesozoic Era will appreciate the gift shop stocked with a variety of dinosaur souvenirs.

Drive time from DC: One hour and 15 minutes

Examine a Medical Museum

When it was created in 1862, Silver Spring's **National Museum of Health and Medicine** *(2500 Linden Ln.)*—then the Army Medical Museum—was on a mission to display "specimens of morbid anatomy." The free museum still offers an education on various body parts, with real examples. Up in Frederick, learn about the work of physicians on the battlefield at the **National Museum of Civil War Medicine** *(48 E. Patrick St.)*. And for a deep dive into a specific branch of medicine, Baltimore's Smithsonian-affiliated **National Museum of Dentistry** *(31 S. Greene St.)* covers everything from dental tools to dentures.

Drive times from DC: One hour (to Frederick and Baltimore)



Dinosaur Land


National Museum of Civil War Medicine

TOP PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CLARK'S ELIOAK FARM; BOTTOM LEFT BY LAURA KALCHEFF; BOTTOM RIGHT BY C. KURT HOLTER

Hang With Alpacas

A typical petting-farm experience conjures images of goats or pigs. **Long Meadows Farm** *(12745 Milltown Rd., Lovettsville)* has those animals, but it's also home to a crowd that's a bit more unusual for Loudoun County: alpacas. Book a one-hour visit for up to six people to nuzzle and feed the fuzzy creatures. Seeking more time? **Black Barn Alpacas** *(2401 Bollinger Mill Rd., Finksburg)* in Maryland's Carroll County lets you spend as long as you want with the animals—within a 10 AM to 4 PM window—once you secure a date online. To bring some of the experience home, the farm has a shop 15 minutes away *(7606 Main St., Sykesville)* selling alpaca fleece clothing.

Drive times from DC: One hour; an hour and 15 minutes

Wander a Whimsical Garden

For imaginative botanicals with an equestrian vibe, head to **Ladew Topiary Gardens** *(3535 Jarrettsville Pike, Monkton)*. Creator Harvey Ladew was a lover of topiaries and fox hunting, and his Maryland estate combines the two pursuits in whimsical fashion. Find more than 100 sculpted shrubs and trees, from a fox-horse-and-hound scene rendered in leafy figures to spiraling Seussian plants. Beyond the bushes, you can learn about Ladew's home, with its English-country aesthetic and horsey art collection, or explore the Butterfly House, where native butterflies flit about while caterpillars eat the plants below. The butterfly exhibit closes for the season on September 25.

Drive time from DC: One and a half hours



Baltimore's Witch Board Museum

Commune With Spirits

In addition to being the home of Edgar Allen Poe, the father of American Gothic, Baltimore is where the Ouija board was created. For those who enjoy the occult, consider this Charm City itinerary. Start with the Ouija-board-shaped headstone of original patent holder Elijah Bond in **Green Mount Cemetery** *(1501 Greenmount Ave.)*, then head to Gothic **Westminster Hall and Burying Ground** *(519 W. Fayette St.)* for a stop at Poe's grave and a monthly tour of the creepy catacombs. Round out the macabre route at the **Witch Board Museum** *(3534 Chestnut Ave.)* in the Hampden neighborhood, a small exhibition with a collection of rare spirit boards.

Drive time from DC: One hour



Ladew Topiary Gardens

TOP PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WITCH BOARD MUSEUM; BOTTOM BY HELEN NORMAN

DINING GUIDE





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Digital Dalliance

How artificial intelligence is wrecking some marriages. Plus, our list of top divorce attorneys.

By Damare Baker

PHOTOGRAPH IN ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF PEXELS

DESPITE FOUR DECADES AS A DIVORCE attorney, Bethesda lawyer Cheryl New found herself in uncharted territory during a recent case. Her client's husband was sending messages—and hundreds of thousands of dollars—to a creator on an adult-content site. Eventually, he learned that the woman wasn't a real person at all but an AI chatbot. Still, he opted to continue their relationship, giving "her" his desire, money, and attention, similar to any other affair.

"I've handled my share of unconventional cases," New says. "But this was the first time I've thought, 'I don't even know if I can call her a person.' "

New isn't alone. Local divorce attorneys say they're encountering a steadily growing number of cases where AI is at the center of marital breakdown. It's showing up in different forms: companion apps such as Replika and Nomi, marketed as always-available girlfriends or confidants; chatbots on adult-content platforms, where a customer can talk to an AI version of a real or invented person; and, increasingly, general-purpose platforms such as ChatGPT, where people spend hours engaging in unfiltered emotional conversation. Lawyers say the technology is rarely the sole cause of a divorce, but it's becoming a common thread or the tipping point for a marriage.

According to Bridget Todd, the DC coauthor of *Love at First Prompt: AI and the Future of Intimacy,* building an interpersonal relationship with AI is a gradual, often unintentional process. It starts with menial tasks, and then the connection can escalate to something more intimate. Research shows that humans have a natural tendency to personify technology. Consider how we project traits onto an adorable Roomba vacuum.

"AI is no different, especially when AI is designed to speak to you in friendly and flattering ways," Todd says. That strong emotional connection can also lead to secrecy. "People are turning to AI because they have other parts of themselves that they want to be able to share without judgment and without feeling like, 'Oh, I have to be mindful of the other human in this interaction.' "

DC attorney Rebekah Sullivan recalls a case in which her client's husband accused his wife of cheating. He told a chatbot his

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY ALINA SPATZ

theories about her and other men. The AI, trained to be agreeable and validating, affirmed his suspicion of an affair. Not only was it incorrect, but the allegation made the divorce difficult to settle. "There were live humans around him telling him that didn't happen," Sullivan says, "but he chose to believe AI over the humans."

In the courtroom, judges aren't differentiating between old-fashioned and AI affairs. According to New, conduct with chatbots is taken into account if it affects asset division, spousal support, or custody arrangements. Sometimes, in cases such as New's example of the affair with a chatbot, transactional relationships with AI can be used to allege financial irresponsibility. In custody disputes, AI chats are presented as evidence that a parent is being inattentive or neglectful.

The technology may be modern, but for New, the behavior is not. This phenomenon of AI disrupting relationships reminds her of the early 2010s, when she started to see marriages strained by online games. Back then, it was World of Warcraft guilds and late-night chats on Words With Friends. But in 2026? It's a chatbot that always remembers your birthday and never asks you to unload the dishwasher.

Top Divorce Lawyers

These attorneys were named by their peers as the area's best divorce lawyers in our most recent survey

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Law Office of Jessica E. Adler

Alice Ahearn
Eris Law Group

Sanford K. Ain
Ain & Bank

Erik P. Arena
Arena Family Law

Natalia Wilson Armstrong
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Jeff Lowinger
New & Lowinger

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Selected photographs by Shannon Ayres, Hilary Schwab and Michael Ventura.



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AREAS OF PRACTICE

Divorce
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DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS

Big Guns: Washington's Top 30 Divorce Lawyers
— *Washingtonian*
Top Lawyers: 30 Stars of the Bar
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When faced with a contentious family conflict, it can be difficult to plan the best path forward for yourself and your family. The attorneys of Grover & Badalian are strategic, critically thinking, innovative and passionate in pursuing advantageous outcomes for our clients. At the same time, we assist our clients in trying to think longer-term for the best outcome and then work with our clients to set them in their new direction. Our attorneys are well versed in highly contested custody cases, and have handled difficult cases involving parental alienation, resist and refuse of children to follow a custody schedule, custody modification and enforcement. In addition, we have extensive experience in complex financial matters involving tracing marital/non-marital funds, dissipation of assets, business valuations, and possible tax consequences to distribution of assets. At Grover and Badalian, we prioritize staying current, not only on changes within family law, but in all practice areas that can impact our cases. For example, a tax code revision can alter the ideal distribution of assets; fluctuations in tariff costs may affect business valuations; and new research in child development and mental health can inform the appropriate custodial arrangement. We continually monitor these developments to deliver strategic, forward-thinking, advocacy for our clients.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Grover & Badalian specializes in divorce cases with complex financial issues, alimony, custody, child support, modifications, enforcement, and pre/post-nuptial agreements.

DESIGNATIONS and AWARDS

- *Both of our founding partners are listed in Washingtonian* "Top Divorce Lawyers"
- *Bethesda Magazine* "Top Attorneys"
- *Best Lawyers®, and Best Law Firms* 2022-2026

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Over the past 40 years, Paradiso, Taub, Sinay & Kostecka P.C. has established a well-earned reputation for excellence and adherence to the highest ethical standards in the practice of family law. The firm concentrates its practice in all areas of family law in Maryland and DC, including divorce, custody, spousal/child support, equitable division of property, pre/post-nuptial agreements, mediation, and international divorce issues. In collaboration with financial experts, counselors, and other professionals, the attorneys have developed strategies designed to achieve the best possible outcomes for their clients. They are experienced litigators, mediators, arbitrators, and collaborative law practitioners, recognized for their skill and professionalism.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Family Law Litigation, Mediation, Collaborative Law, and Arbitration

AFFILIATIONS & AWARDS

AV Rating, Martindale Hubbell®; *Washingtonian* (Lifetime Achievement Awards), *Best Lawyers of America®*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, *Bethesda Magazine*, *U.S. News & World Report*; American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, International Academy of Family Lawyers, and Chambers & Partners.

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Brian K. Pearlstein, ESQ.

BRODSKY RENEHAN PEARLSTEIN & BOUQUET, CHARTERED



Brian K. Pearlstein is the Managing Partner of Brodsky Renehan Pearlstein & Bouquet, Chartered, one of Maryland and Washington, D.C.'s most respected family law practices. With more than 30 years of experience, Brian has built a reputation for skilled, strategic advocacy in complex divorce and family law matters across the region.

Brian represents business owners, corporate executives, and high-net-worth individuals navigating high-stakes divorce, custody disputes, and intricate financial matters. His work routinely involves the valuation of business interests and professional practices, real estate holdings, and stock portfolios, as well as the identification of hidden assets.

Whether through negotiation, mediation, or aggressive courtroom litigation, Brian is committed to achieving the best possible outcome for each client. He is licensed in Maryland and Washington, D.C., and has argued cases before the Maryland Court of Special Appeals, the D.C. Court of Appeals, and the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Brian is a trusted advocate for clients facing the most difficult moments of their lives, and his record of recognition reflects decades of exceptional service.

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*™ 2010-2026, Daily Record Power List 2022, *Washingtonian* Top Lawyer 2015–2026, *Best Lawyers in America*® 2015-2026

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Sean P. Schmergel

SCHMERGEL FAMILY LAW, PLC

With nearly 23 years of family law practice, Sean P. Schmergel is widely 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. Mr. Schmergel and his team of associate attorneys at Schmergel Family Law are 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

Rated top family law attorney by *Washingtonian, Super Lawyers™, Best Lawyers®*, VA Business LegalElite, *Northern Virginia Magazine* & *Arlington Magazine;* Martindale AV rated; President 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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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Bean, Kinney & Korman is committed to putting clients first. As a full-service, multi-disciplinary law firm, our attorneys provide experienced, strategic counsel to businesses, individuals, and families across a broad range of practice areas, including land use and zoning, family law, commercial litigation, employment, mergers and acquisitions, government contracting, and more.

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The attorneys recognized here are respected leaders in the field of family law, known for providing thoughtful guidance, skilled advocacy, and compassionate counsel. They are dedicated to helping clients navigate life's most challenging transitions while working toward the best possible outcomes.



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

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Family Law

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS
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For more than 30 years, Andrew M. Beato has represented clients in complex litigation, government investigations, and high-stakes whistleblower matters. He has achieved exceptional results for whistleblowers, helping recover more than $3.8 billion for federal and state governments. As a partner at Stein Mitchell Beato & Missner LLP, Mr. Beato advises clients in matters involving the False Claims Act, financial fraud, securities and commodities violations, healthcare enforcement, and other government-related disputes. Known for his strategic approach and commitment to client advocacy, he provides trusted counsel in sensitive and complex cases, helping individuals and organizations navigate challenging legal matters with confidence and discretion.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
False Claims Act Litigation, Whistleblower Representation, Government Investigations, Civil Litigation, and Fraud Matters.

DESIGNATIONS & AWARDS
Washingtonian Top Lawyer; National Trial Lawyers Top 100 Trial Lawyers; U.S. News Best Law Firms First Tier.

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Curran Moher Weis, PC congratulates attorneys Gerald R. Curran and Steven Goldman for being named to the *Washingtonian's* list of 2026 Top Divorce Lawyers!

At Curran Moher Weis, PC, we pride ourselves on providing goal-oriented legal representation for individuals with complex separation, divorce, and post-divorce related issues. With over 150 years of combined experience, our lawyers craft tailored legal strategies for optimal results. We are skilled litigators in the courtroom as well as the largest group of Collaborative Divorce practitioners in the DC Metro area. Our attorneys have received many of the highest awards and distinctions in the legal field and we are proud of our reputation in the legal community.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Divorce litigation, Collaborative Divorce, Mediation, Child Custody, Spousal Support

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS
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With an emphasis on comprehensive service, our attorneys are dedicated to assisting clients in a wide variety of family related matters. The attorneys of MDB have significant experience handling complex divorce and custody issues. Our services are tailored to the unique circumstances of each client. We make every effort to reach resolution through amicable negotiations, mediation or the collaborative process, but are known for producing positive results in the courtroom and zealously advocating for clients when litigation is necessary. Our practice is focused primarily in the trial courts of Northern Virginia and D.C., as well as the appellate courts of the Commonwealth.

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Domestic relations

DESIGNATIONS & AWARDS
Washingtonian Top Lawyers
U.S. News Best Law Firms
Best Lawyers
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Arlington Magazine Top Lawyers
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AREAS OF PRACTICE

Divorce, Custody, Support, Alimony, Marital Property Division, Mediation, Pre- and Postnuptial Agreements, Parent Coordination, Best Interest Attorney

AFFILIATIONS and AWARDS

Washingtonian Top Lawyers, American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers; *Best Lawyers in America®*, *Super Lawyers™*

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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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AREAS OF PRACTICE

Divorce, Custody, Support, Alimony, Marital Property Division, Mediation, Pre-Nuptial Agreements, Collaborative Practice, Estate Litigation

DESIGNATIONS and AWARDS

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers; International Academy of Family Lawyers; *Washingtonian* "Top Lawyers"; *Bethesda Magazine* "Top Lawyers"; Top 100 Lawyers in DC and Maryland, *Super Lawyers*™

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Hostetter Strent LLC takes pride in its team of nine attorneys, who possess diverse experience from various practice areas and regions. **Heather Hostetter, Amy Strent and Sheila Kadagathur** are honored to be recognized as *Washingtonian* Top Divorce Lawyers for 2026.

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Liz Reinecke


Randall Herriott


Maureen Glackin


Brendan Madden


Daniel Renart


Paul Reinstein


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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 a 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 Maryland Hispanic Bar Association and is a former and current 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



Julie Hottle Day, ESQ.

CULIN, SHARP, AUTRY & DAY, PLC

Julie Hottle Day, Chair of the Family Law Group at Culin, Sharp, Autry & Day, PLC, has more than twenty-five years of experience resolving complex divorce and family law matters through negotiation, mediation, and litigation. She is particularly recognized for representing clients in cases involving business ownership, executive compensation, professional practices, and other sophisticated financial issues. Known for meticulous preparation, strategic thinking, and compassionate advocacy, Julie believes clients achieve the best outcomes when they are informed, heard, and actively engaged in the legal process. She represents clients throughout Northern Virginia and is a frequent lecturer for continuing legal education programs.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Complex Divorce Mediation, Litigation, Modification and Enforcement; Child Custody; Child and Spousal Support; Retirement Benefits

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS

Expertise recognized in Martindale-Hubbell, *Best Lawyers in America*®, *Super Lawyers*™, and *Washingtonian, Northern Virginia*, and *Virginia Business* magazines.

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Divorce and family law attorneys Sandy Brooks, Cheryl Hepfer, Erin Golding, Samantha Kravitz, Joseph Condo, 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, Sandy, Erin, and Joe are Fellows of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML). Cheryl and Sandy are also Fellows of the International Academy of Family Lawyers (IAFL). Joe is also a Fellow of the American College of Trial 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 on the Board 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).

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

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS

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240.507.1700



Front Row: Sandy Brooks, Cheryl Hepfer
Back Row: Erin Golding, Marshall Yaap, Samantha Kravitz
Not Pictured: Joseph Condo



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AREAS OF PRACTICE

Family Law. Collaborative Practice, mediation, settlement, negotiation, advocacy. Also serving as mediators.

DESIGNATIONS, AFFILIATIONS, and AWARDS

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Federal Practice Group

ERIC MONTALVO

Eric S. Montalvo, Founding Partner of Federal Practice Group, has built his practice around solving the kinds of legal challenges that rarely fit within conventional boundaries. A former United States Marine officer and federal prosecutor, he advises clients in complex litigation, government investigations, cross-border disputes, digital asset recovery, and international crisis matters. Drawing on a multidisciplinary network of investigators, forensic specialists, technology professionals, and international partners, Montalvo develops coordinated strategies for matters where legal, financial, and operational risks intersect. His practice reflects a simple philosophy: the future of advocacy belongs to those who can combine experience, innovation, and disciplined judgment to solve increasingly complex problems.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Complex Commercial Litigation, Cross-Border Disputes, Government Investigations, White Collar Defense, Cryptocurrency & Digital Assets, Asset Recovery, Financial Fraud, Internal Investigation, Regulatory Enforcement, International Arbitration

DESIGNATIONS and AWARDS

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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
Juncker: *Washingtonian* Magazine, Top Lawyers; *Best Lawyers in America®*

202.280.2275 | c-wlaw.com



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, Adoption, Protective Orders

DESIGNATIONS and AWARDS

Director, Board of Fairfax Law Foundation; Past President, Fairfax Bar Association; Past President, Northern Virginia Chapter, VWAA; Gold Member, Rule 6.1 Society, LSNV

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thpfamilylaw.com



From left to right: Melissa L. Schefkind, Magdalena D'Aiuto, Ethan Swierczewski, Anne Marie Jackson, Darryl Feldman, Rebecca Shankman, Rachel De Rose.

Feldman Jackson, PC

LEADERS IN FAMILY LAW

At Feldman Jackson, we focus exclusively on family law, bringing deep experience to every case—from straightforward divorces to complex disputes involving asset valuation, business interests, and child custody. While our goal is to resolve matters through negotiation, our attorneys are seasoned litigators ready to strategically advocate in court when necessary. Our attorneys are also skilled at mediation and help clients craft creative, flexible solutions outside the courtroom. Our partners serve as mediators, helping parties reach mutually agreeable outcomes. Many of our attorneys are trained in Collaborative Law—a team-based approach that fosters balanced, respectful resolutions.

Ranked among the top national and local family law professionals, our attorneys also teach and mentor other attorneys, including teaching trial advocacy. This depth of experience brings acumen, sharp legal insight, and the ability to creatively and strategically resolve even the most challenging family law matters. We understand how difficult it is to involve a lawyer in a family dispute. The attorneys at Feldman Jackson offer clarity, compassion, and strong advocacy—helping clients navigate transition and take control of their future.

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Divorce, Mediation, Child Custody & Support, Property Division, Spousal Support, Pre- & Postnuptial Agreements, Litigation.

AFFILIATIONS and AWARDS

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers; Best Law Firms, DC, Family Law & Family Law Mediation; Top Divorce Attorneys; *Washingtonian's* Top Lawyers; *Best Lawyers in America*® & Ones to Watch® 2027; Lawyer of the Year, Family Law-DC Metro Area; *Super Lawyers*™ & Rising Stars®, MD & DC.

7600 Wisconsin Avenue
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Roberts Family Law

CHRIS ROBERTS AND HEATHER COLLIER

Chris Roberts and Heather Collier 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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WASHINGTONIAN

WEDDINGS

OUR ULTIMATE GUIDE

THE VERY BEST VENDORS AND VENUES IN DC, MARYLAND, AND VIRGINIA

13 REAL WEDDINGS

Local couples share their wow-worthy details

PLUS:

- → Pet-friendly tips
- → Budgeting for big moments
- → Right-off-the-runway bridal styles

PHOTOGRAPH BY KIR TUBEN

Weddings: What's New

A Silver Spring art company offers a chic new way to preserve floral memories

BY JENNA LEE



Couples often spend tens of thousands of dollars on floral arrangements that make a splashy impression on their wedding day but are discarded the next. Combining her creativity and printmaking skills, local art educator Zoey Solomon helps newlyweds make flowers last forever through her floral scanography business, Zolomon Prints.



HOW IT WORKS

After special events, customers ship flower arrangements to Solomon, who positions them on a flatbed scanner to make high-resolution prints for display at home that capture the finest details of the flowers.

HOW IT STARTED

Solomon says she got into scanography—the process of creating artful images with a flatbed scanner—about a year ago, wanting to explore "the intersection of art and technology." Realizing that plants and flowers from big events are often thrown away, she decided to focus on their unique beauty for clients in a meaningful, personal way.

HOW IT'S GOING

Solomon recently began partnering with floral companies and wedding planners and hopes to expand: "It's nice to be able to provide a service that memorializes some of the best days of people's lives."

Commissions for Solomon's scanography prints (zolomon.studio/wedding-flower-preservation.html) start at $95.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF ARTWORK COURTESY OF ZOLOMON PRINTS; RING BY BLUE NILE

GOOD TO KNOW

More wedding news from around town



PUTTING A RING ON IT

Jewelry options have never been more plentiful. Here are two new Georgetown spots for perusing the bling: **Blue Nile** *(3109 M St., NW)*, which was founded in 1999 and has a wide selection of gemstones as well as customizable engagement rings, recently opened its DC location. And just down the street, **Hitched** *(1663 Wisconsin Ave., NW)*—a fine-jewelry store that also offers customizable wedding bands and engagement rings, plus an online custom ring-builder—celebrates its third birthday this summer.

CAKE MIX

Wedding-bakery favorites **Liberty Baking Co.** and **Jisoo Cake Design** announced last year they were combining forces to provide top-notch cakes to local customers. Liberty owner Alison Friedman and Jisoo Yoo explained in an Instagram post (@libertyandjisoo) that the partnership follows years of collaboration. In addition to custom creations, they offer seasonal treats, cakes for other occasions, and to-go wedding cakes—the last start at $380 and include designs like the classic white Yuna and the "something blue" Veruca Salt.

A NEW VENUE

This summer, the team behind the veteran event design/build and production company Social Supply will open a Navy Yard venue, **Supplyhouse** *(supplyhousedc.com)*, designed for "how events actually work." The historic building includes a seated-dinner area and dance floor and a 10,000-square-foot courtyard, and clients may plan their own event or hand it over to the Social Supply team. Bookings open September 1.

How Much Did That Cost?

People are often surprised to see how things add up during wedding planning. To shed light on a few popular line items, we asked couples and pros to share the details of some actual budgets. Rates vary based on season and other factors, but here's a breakdown of elements from three recent weddings.

BY AMY MOELLER



LOVE NOTES

Escort walls are a big-day focal point that can pack a creative punch. This display—from a celebration at the Willard—incorporated one of our favorite trends: a personalized letter from the couple to each guest. Planner's note: Cards for couples and families were combined in a single envelope.

THE CREDITS

Planning: Roberts & Co. Events

Escort wall: The Dandelion Patch

Florist: Duran Floral Design

THE NUMBERS

Guest count: 150

Florals: $500

Production, including wall, vinyl, custom color, and labor: $1,325

Envelopes and printed cards: $730

Total cost: $2,555

SUGAR ON TOP

Though a classic wedding cake is certainly en vogue, when it comes time for dessert, couples love to share unique favorites with their guests. From macarons and assorted pastries to mini pies, popsicles, and other treats, dessert menus are getting a lot of attention. For this recent wedding at DAR, a gelato cart was the star of the dessert course.

THE CREDITS

Planning: Christine McFarlane Events

Gelato cart: Gemma Gelato via Corcoran Caterers

THE NUMBERS

Guest count: 137

Gelato, including delivery and setup; 1½ hours of service; and four gelato flavors, plus cups, napkins, and spoons: $2,000



SWEET SERENADE

Classical musicians are a tried and true ceremony choice, and pairing a DJ with a live musician is a fun way to up the energy on the dance floor. At this Bluemont wedding, a violinist played the ceremony and cocktail hour, then was joined by a saxophonist for the first dance. Later, the saxophonist and DJ led the dance party.

THE CREDITS

Planning: WedWithSteph

Musicians: Nusheen Farahani (violin); Lina Saroza (saxophone)

DJ: The Upchurch Event Co.

THE NUMBERS

Violinist (three hours): $1,995

Saxophonist (four hours): $2,000

DJ (full 4½-hour reception): $2,000

Total: $5,995 plus gratuities



PHOTOGRAPHS OF ESCORT WALL BY KYLA JEANETTE PHOTOGRAPHY; GELATO CART BY EMILY ELLEN PHOTOGRAPHY; DANCING BY CARL ELIXIR STUDIO

Puppy Love

Event pros share six tips for including your dog in your party pack

BY ANDREA POE

Dogs at weddings always steal the show, but there are some considerations before you add them to the guest list. Here's what planners who specialize in pet-friendly weddings advise.



Outdoor photo sessions are an ideal opportunity to include a fur bestie.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MANDA WEAVER PHOTOGRAPHY

1.

THINK ABOUT YOUR DOG'S TEMPERAMENT

This is the most important factor, says Hannah Dann, owner of Maryland's Hannah Belle Events. "Are they okay on a leash? Do they mind loud noises or music?" Setting realistic expectations is a must, says Drew Archibald of Dapper Retriever Events & Weddings in Arlington. If there's a possibility your pet won't be comfortable in the hubbub, he suggests enjoying the day with the humans in your life and scheduling a separate photo event with the animal.

2.

DESIGNATE A QUIET AREA FOR YOUR FUR GUEST(S)

Even the calmest, friendliest dogs can get overstimulated, Dann says: "Be sure the venue has a place for dogs to decompress."

3.

WATCH THE WEATHER

"If it is raining, or even if it rained the night before, are you okay with muddy paws on your wedding dress or on your guests?" asks Dann.

WEDDING-DAY DOG CARE

If you don't already have a designated dog minder, consider hiring a helper. These two experienced outfits are worth checking out.

FUREVER & FUR ALWAYS

fureverandfuralways.com

With outposts around the country, this company's services include dog transportation to and from the venue; dressing them in their fancy attire; photo and ceremony assistance; chaperoning; and pampering. Standard packages start at $285 and can be customized.

CAPITOL CANINE WEDDINGS

capitolcanineweddings.com

This pet-attendant company works in DC and Northern Virginia. Services include everything from a ceremony appearance to full-day care, with packages starting at $499.



An especially dapper pup visits the bride's getting-ready suite.

4.

IDENTIFY A DOG ATTENDANT

If you choose a family member or friend to look after your pet, Dann cautions, be prepared for that person to miss some meaningful moments. As an alternative, she recommends hiring a handler for transport, feeding, and wrangling onsite. A trusted neighbor, sitter, or trainer is a good idea, says Archibald. He suggests having the attendant spend extra time with your dog beginning a few months before the event. And, if you have more than one pup, one handler for each.

5.

FAMILIARIZE YOUR PET WITH THE VENUE

Particularly if it's a farm or home to other animals, Archibald advises visiting the site with your dog ahead of time to be sure your special guest can handle the distractions.

6.

TAKE YOUR PUP PHOTOS FIRST

"No matter what else you do," says Archibald, "plan to take pictures before any guests arrive so your dogs are super cute and calm before all the excitement begins."

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY KIR TUBEN; BOTTOM BY TESS SCHILKE

PET-FRIENDLY VENUES

Traditionally, it's been wineries and farms that allow dogs to witness the "I dos," but, increasingly, places of all kinds are opening their doors to them. Here are a few that will welcome your paw patrol.

POWER AND PAWS

Dogs and kitten heels often meet in the airy courtyard tucked into the Fairmont Washington, D.C., a retreat for power players. The hotel is so accommodating that staff will help dress dogs in tuxes, transport them to the ceremony in a pup-mobile (okay, a cute wagon), and print their portraits on cocktail napkins. Bonus: The Fairmont's chef is a master at healthy canine cuisine.

GREENING OUT IN THE CITY

Dogs are welcome at the Josephine Butler Parks Center, just outside Meridian Hill Park—and the 1927 mansion allows them indoors as well, so couples can stay close to their companions as they get ready for the wedding. A former embassy, this property is now all about the elegance and none of the pretension. Bonus: Unlike at many other venues, dogs can be part of the reception, not just the ceremony.

SOPHISTICATED SPOT

For top pup treatment, you can't beat the Four Seasons in Georgetown, where pet-friendly weddings take place in the roomy courtyard that can hold about 200 guests. Custom menus for dogs, room snacks, walkers, and cozy beds are all part of the love story. Bonus: Size doesn't matter. From teacup Chihuahua to Great Dane, your buddy is welcome.

BEACH BABIES

Ocean City welcomes dog-positive weddings in two locales. You can marry with your pet alongside you on the beach if you time it right (October through April). Looking at a different season? Consider a ceremony on the bayside beach at Homer Gudelsky Park, with a view of the town's skyline. Bonus: Neither site has a rental fee, just a simple city permit application that costs about $25.

CHESAPEAKE CHIC

Dogs can be part of the nuptials on the lawn overlooking the waterfront at the Inn at Perry Cabin in St. Michaels. The luxe resort encourages couples to create and name signature cocktails after their pets, plus there are dog-friendly rooms—some with their own little garden. Bonus: With some restrictions, doggie dignitaries can board boats in the hotel's fleet for a private charter with their humans.

RIVERSIDE RETREAT

Three hours from DC, Chippokes State Park boasts a historic mansion along the James River, just across the water from Jamestown. The Virginia property offers couples, their dogs, and guests free rein on all 2,000 acres of farmland, gardens, and sandy beach that's famous for the occasional fossil or shark's tooth. Bonus: Pets can stay with guests in quaint cabins in the park.



MICRO MODERN MOUNTAIN

Indigo House, a contemporary B&B, is nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, about two and a half hours from DC. The low-key inn loves dogs so much that they stay free overnight, with unlimited treats. Up to 50 guests plus your four-legged pals can lodge in the woods or the meadow. Bonus: Dog toys are available at no charge.

Black-tie pet attire makes for an extra-festive (and adorable) touch.

Runway Report

Hot off the spring bridal runways, next season's styles have plenty to love. Among the top trends we spotted: ultra-grand skirts, bows upon bows, dramatic backs (a showstopping element for the ceremony!), halter-top necklines, and many a moment for scarves. Other trends-within-trends you'll continue to see: color; peplum and basque waists; plus lots of lace and other texture. Here are a few looks worth checking out.

BY AMY MOELLER



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF DESIGN HOUSES; PHOTOGRAPHS OF WANG FENG AND PETER LANGNER GOWNS BY BARCELONA BRIDAL WEEK


Wang Feng
Justin Alexander
Viktor & Rolf
DRAMATIC BACKS


Alyssa Kristin
BOWS
Locket
(formerly Wtoo)
Watters
Martina Liana Luxe
HALTER TOPS
Peter Langner
Katherine Tash

REAL WEDDINGS

These local celebrations feature styles and designs to inspire

BY AMY MOELLER

9.20.25

Isabelle & Krunal

Goodstone Inn
Middleburg

Photographs by Audra Wrisley Photography

ISABELLE AND KRUNAL MET DURING their first year of medical school at Duke. He says he felt immediately pulled toward her, and she says he felt like home. Five years after their first date at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, the Durham couple got engaged.

They returned to the bride's home turf for the intimate outdoor wedding they'd envisioned in the Virginia Piedmont, with Goodstone Inn's sustainable farm, beehives, and resident llama setting the scene. The couple's sage-and-amber color scheme carried through the florals, with seasonal, locally grown flowers in natural, unstructured arrangements. Highlights at the reception were signature cocktails that included whiskey sours based on Ina Garten's recipe and a French Blonde elderflower concoction, plus a farm-to-table meal inspired by the venue's gardens. The most memorable splurge: an epic dance floor, the newlyweds say, where "the world's best band" kept loved ones on their feet through the night.











THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Simply Chic Events

Florist: Nature Composed

Invitations: J. Lily Design

Cake: Fluffy Thoughts Cakes

Hair and makeup: MAB Hair & Makeup Artistry

Bride's attire: Jane Hill

Groom's attire: ABR Tailors & Suits (Greensboro, North Carolina)

Music: Kennedy String Quartet; The Source from Washington Talent

Rentals: Curated Events; Nuage Designs; Stradley Davidson; Something Vintage

Transportation: Dulles Executive Sedan Service

Videographer: Elephant Memories

Tent and lighting: Curated Events

Golf carts: All One Venture

THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Glint Events

Florist: Bespoke Floral Design

Invitations: Me By Meg Paper Design

Caterer: Cater 2 Events

Cake: Sweet Fix RVA

Hair and makeup: BrideFace Richmond

Bride's attire: Berta

Bridesmaids' attire: Lula Kate

Groom's and groomsmen's attire: Men's Wearhouse

Music: Jamestown String Quartet from East Coast Entertainment; Right to Party Band from East Coast Entertainment (ceremony piano and reception band)

Rentals: Rent-E-Quip; BBJ La Tavola; Nuage Designs; Paisley & Jade; Classic Party Rentals

Transportation: Albemarle Limousine; Richmond Limo

Videographer: Michael Lemley Films

Lighting: Wedding Lighting Co.

Piano movers: Taylor Piano Restorations











6.7.25

Charlotte & Blake

Private residence
Aylett, Va.

Photographs by David Abel

CHARLOTTE AND BLAKE MET AT A PARTY at James Madison University, where he played football and she was a cheerleader. They hit it off, they say, over their shared farming- and family-oriented backgrounds. Later, Blake proposed on his family's Virginia Beach farm, where both their families—in on the surprise—gathered to celebrate Charlotte's mother's birthday.

The following summer, they gathered again—with more than 300 guests—at Charlotte's family home for an open-air wedding with an enchanted-garden feel. Wisteria appeared in garlands draped above the ceremony aisle, and again in the arch that remains in the garden today. A musician accompanied the ceremony on the bride's family's grand piano. Heirloom brass candleholders were included in the table designs at the reception, where twinkle lights hung overhead. On the menu: sweet-potato/ham biscuits and an oyster bar, then a family-style dinner of beef tenderloin, potatoes, roasted vegetables, and an angel-hair pasta with shrimp that the newlyweds say their guests still talk about.

3.8.25

Qianna & Deshaune

Westin Annapolis
Annapolis

Photographs by
Terri Baskin Photography

TWO YEARS AFTER DESHAUNE, A physical-education teacher, nonprofit founder, and coach, messaged Qianna, who works for the federal government, on Facebook, he proposed while the pair were in Cancún celebrating her 30th birthday.

Their wedding five years later was modern and fashion-forward, with a black-and-white "moody romance" theme. Before a first look that included their children, Qianna enjoyed quiet time in the bridal suite, while Deshaune's getting-ready spot was designed to mimic a vibrant contemporary barbershop. The runway-inspired ceremony featured a raised, candlelit aisle anchored by an eight-foot pedestal featuring the couple's monogram. At the black-velvet-draped reception, the newlyweds were joined by their two sons at a family-style sweetheart table framed by a soaring double arch, and estate tables, each topped with candlelight and flowers, were lined with black-and-white chairs for guest seating.











THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Howerton + Wooten Events

Florist: Assembly by K

Invitations: The Knot

Cake: Sweet Elevations

Hairstylist: J'Wiafe Hair

Makeup artist: Makeup by Pnang

Bride's attire: Elegance by Roya

Groom's attire: Stanlion

Music: DJ Curley Sue

Production, lighting, and drapery: Max Powers Productions

Rentals: BBJ La Tavola; Posh Event Rentals; Select Event Group; Something Vintage

Videographer: Drip Shotzz

Content creation: Paye Creations

Officiant: Shelby Tuck-Horton

Bridal-suite designer: Sophisticated Party Life Events

Day-of grooming: On Set Barber Shop (haircuts and shaves)

THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Adriana Marie Events (now Trivien Events)

Florist: Floral & Bloom

Invitations: Kelsey Malie Design

Caterer: Spilled Milk Catering

Cake: Fluffy Thoughts Cakes

Hair and makeup: Vintage Veils

Bride's attire: Rivini by Rita Vinieris from Love Couture Bridal

Groom's and groomsmen's attire: Capital Custom Clothiers

Music: Spectrum Band from Washington Talent

Rentals: White Glove Rentals; Honeywood Event + Tent; Something Vintage

Tent: On Your Mark

Draping: Fabrication Events

Transportation: Thoroughbred

Favors: Little Black Barn Co.

Videographer: Little Kings Media











6.21.25

Gillie & Ben

Whitehall Manor
Annapolis

Photographs by Lauren R. Swann

THOUGH THEY'RE FROM THE SAME town in Howard County—and knew each other in elementary school—Gillie, a speech-language pathologist, and Ben, a consultant, didn't start dating until after college. Two and a half years after their first date at a Mexican restaurant in Bethesda, Ben popped the question on the beach in Rehoboth.

For their waterfront wedding in June—officiated by their high-school English teacher—the pair say they wanted an affair filled with family, friends, joy, and lots of color. Pinks, purples, blues, greens, and orange combined for a vibrant design that included bright florals in plentiful arrangements, including two oversize arches in the reception tent; signature cocktails—Aperol spritzes and Painkillers—served in pink coupe glasses; a pink bar at cocktail hour and two blue bars at the reception; three mixed-and-matched table and place-setting designs; and teal-velvet chairs at the head table. The dinner menu included crabcakes, filets, and, for dessert, red-velvet wedding cake.

3.28.26

Emily & Christian

Perry Belmont House
Washington, DC

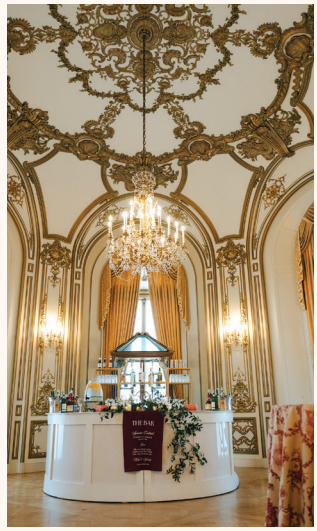
Photographs by
Isabel Bracho Photography

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER ON A study-abroad program in Berlin, Emily and Christian discovered they'd attended the same middle and high schools. She thought he was "super sweet"—an impression formed in part by the teddy-bear sweatshirt he was wearing. (She later learned it was actually the Ralph Lauren bear.) Her warmth and humor, he says, drew him out of his shell. Six years after their first date, they got engaged.

A "vintage romance" theme helped create the grand escape-to-Europe vibe they wanted, carried out in shades of pink and red, with pops of green, navy, periwinkle, and gold. In addition to the venue, which they considered a mini stand-in for Versailles, Emily chose a Marie Antoinette-inspired gown and custom jewelry. Other highlights included the string trio that played modern music à la *Bridgerton;* an artist who painted a portrait for each guest; and centerpieces that included fruit and baguettes—nods to both the European aesthetic and Christian's love of baking.











THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Jayne Heir Weddings + Events

Florist: Ritual Floral Studio

Invitations: Minted

Caterer: Simply Fresh Events

Cake: Wegmans

Hairstylist: Beauty by Natalia L

Makeup artist: Parris Hicks

Bride's attire: Milla Nova

Bridesmaids' attire: Azazie

Groom's and groomsmen's attire: Bruce Julian

Music: Atoka Strings; DJ Ricardo

Rentals: Select Event Group; DC Rental; BBJ La Tavola

Draping and lighting: Fabrication Events

Live artist: Spencer Grace Art

Content creation: In the Moment Content Creators











THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Evermore Occasions

Florist: Shining Time Wedding

Invitations: The Blissful Design

Cake: Fluffy Thoughts Cakes

Hair and makeup: Hellooo Gorgeous Beauty

Attire: Hall Madden

Music: Atoka String Quartet; DJ Eric Jaundoo from Signature Talent

Rentals: Select Event Group

Signage: Leah Letters

Welcome-reception venue: Boundary Stone

9.27.25

Cory & Tyrone

National Press Club
Washington, DC

Photographs by The Axtells

CORY, AN ATTORNEY FROM MASSACHU-setts, and Tyrone, a high-school history teacher from New York, met at a bar in DC. After just a few dates—starting with their first at Bluejacket in Navy Yard—Cory left DC for a job in Philadelphia, but on the ten-year anniversary of their meeting, they proposed to each other in a whirlwind day that ended with drinks at their first-date spot.

The Petworth pair describe their wedding theme as "old Washington, with a twist," featuring a venue with dark wood paneling and views of the Washington Monument and the White House; florals composed of white orchids, roses, and calla lilies; and a black-tie dress code. The signature cocktails paid homage to their roots: a Jamaican-inspired rum Negroni for Tyrone and a New England-inspired Dunkin' Espresso Martini with a Munchkin garnish for Cory. The venue displayed the flags of Canada, DC, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Massachusetts, New York, and the United Kingdom to represent the grooms' heritages and places they've lived. Reception tables were designated with framed photos of "pop-culture divas," such as Adele and Dolly Parton, and the couple say keeping the dance floor full was a top priority, achieved with a great DJ and a playlist reminiscent of "the best gay bars."

THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Cherry Blossom Weddings and Events

Florist: Toulies en Fleur

Catering: Spilled Milk Catering

Cake: Liberty Baking Co. (now Liberty & Jisoo)

Invitations: The Dandelion Patch

Attire: Pnina Tornai from Kleinfeld (bride); Tom James (groom); Generation Tux (groomsmen)

Hair and makeup: Jasmine Palma Artistry

Rentals: Select Event Group; DC Rental

Music: TI Fusion Band

Videographer: Bowen Films

Content creation: Dreamy Content

Draping, stage, and dance floor: Fabrication Events

Lighting: 4Wall Entertainment

Popsicle stand: Jarabe Gourmet Pops

Transportation: RMA; Vintage Limos











5.16.26

Leslie & Andy

Washington National Cathedral
Washington, DC

Photographs by Kir Tuben

LESLIE, A FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER from the Chicago suburbs, and Andy, a lobbyist from LA, met when Andy spotted Leslie in the Instagram story of a mutual friend and DMed her with a "solid plan": Thursday night at 7:30 on the 12 Stories rooftop at the Wharf. She liked that he was direct with his intentions, and after a six-hour first date, he was envisioning their future. Andy proposed three years later on another rooftop—this one in Chicago, with a mariachi band—while loved ones who'd flown in waited to celebrate.

Their springtime wedding, they say, was a celebration of their Mexican culture designed in neutrals—"white, off-white, ivory, and beige," Leslie jokes. Her favorite moment of the day was belting out "This Is What Dreams Are Made Of" from *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* with friends from every stage of her life. The groom's favorite detail was his tuxedo's lining, which was filled with photos of Leslie—including one from their first date—and their dog, Benito. Other highlights were the vintage Rolls-Royce Leslie surprised her dad with to take them to the cathedral and a Mexican-themed cocktail hour with ceviche and taco bars, Latin popsicles, traditional papel picado banners, and mezcal drinks.



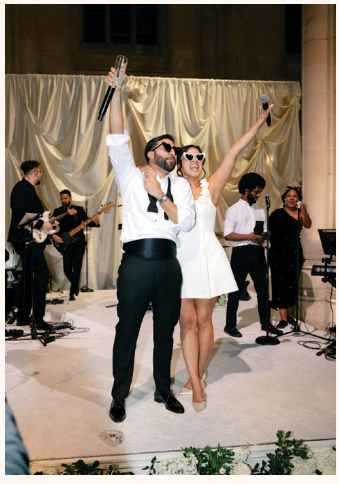














THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Will & Rose Events

Florist: Petal n' Bloom

Invitations: Minted

Caterer: Serendipity Catering

Cake: Signature Sweets by Amanda

Hairstylist: Dominique Nicole

Makeup artist: Blush by Makki

Bride's attire: Allure Bridals from Studio I Do Bridals

Bridesmaids' attire: Show Me Your Mumu

Groom's and groomsmen's attire: Lineage from K&G Fashions (suits); Show Me Your Mumu (ties)

Music: Henry Tyszler (ceremony violinist); Julianna Schmoll (ceremony harpist); The Gramercy from Elegant Music Group

Rentals: Select Event Group

Videographer: Arcadia Pictures

Uplighting and photo booth: Elegant Music Group

Dance floor: Sammy's Rentals

Getaway car: Camelot Classic Cars

Officiant: Corey Goss











8.9.25

Rebekah & Connor

Great Marsh Estate
Bealeton, Va.

Photographs by
Maddy Williams Photography

TWO YEARS AFTER CROSSING PATHS IN a college biology class, Connor, a college basketball coach from Virginia, finally worked up the nerve to ask Rebekah, an associate account manager and aspiring educator from New Jersey, on a double date to a bowling alley. Conversation came naturally, and three years later he proposed on the beach during a weekend away.

Rebekah says the theme for their romantic-garden-elegance wedding was inspired by the timeless style of a European country estate. To keep guests cool during the outdoor ceremony, the couple provided a personalized handheld fan for each of their 100 guests as a practical detail and meaningful keepsake. For the dinner reception, which was decorated in sage, moss, cream, and gold, they chose a band that blended a variety of genres while honoring Rebekah's Caribbean heritage. Signature mocktails were a summery watermelon-basil concoction, and dessert featured a Champagne cake with berry compote and cream-cheese frosting, plus assorted mini desserts and a coffee station.

9.12.25

Ariana & Michael

DAR
Washington, DC

Photographs by
Emily Ellen Photography

EIGHT YEARS AFTER MEETING AS STUdents at GW, Michael, a portfolio manager, proposed to Ariana, who works in influencer marketing (and formerly digital strategy for the Biden White House) on a trip to Italy.

For their wedding, the pair wanted a chic, modern, funky vibe in a historic setting, with a design that honored their respective Chinese and Italian heritages. During cocktail hour, guests had drinks in the venue's library, where appetizers such as seafood fried purses and pork dumplings were served in Chinese-style takeout containers on library carts, and decor featured tomatoes on the vine and lemons, plus jars of dried pasta and canned tomatoes. At the reception, a fortune-cookie display offered seating assignments and cheeky fortunes, and floral designs were a mix of fruit-filled, monochromatic, and ikebana arrangements. After a family-style pasta dinner, dessert included a gelato cart and cannoli station, plus espresso-martini shooters.











THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Christine McFarlane Events

Florist: Wanton Poppies

Invitations: Finer Design Studio

Caterer: Corcoran Caterers

Gelato cart: Gemma's Gelato

Hair and makeup: Bridal Glow with Victoria O

Bride's attire: Newhite from Kinfolk Bridal

Groom's attire: Billy Reid Custom

Music: Encore from Washington Talent

Rentals: Curated Events DC; BBJ La Tavola

Transportation: Washingtonian Luxury Limousine

First-dance choreography: Yours Truly Dance











THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Kaitlin Przezdziecki, Cheers Darling Events

Florist: Holly Heider Chapple Flowers

Paper goods: Scriptura (invitations); Jeanette Pidi Designs (day-of stationery)

Caterer: Spilled Milk Catering

Cake: Fluffy Thoughts Cakes

Hairstylist and makeup: Caitlyn Meyer

Bride's attire: Varca

Groom's attire: Suitsupply (ceremony); Enzo Custom (reception)

Groomsmen's attire: Jos. A. Bank

Music: Black Tie from Washington Talent

Rentals: Something Vintage; Reverie Social; Emerson James; DC Rental

Transportation: RMA

Videographer: Bialek's Music

Officiant: Laura Cannon from Ceremony Officiants

Draping and staging: Fabrication Events

Tenting: A Grand Event

Portable restrooms: Johnny Blue

9.13.25

Angela & Kyle

Private Residence
Upperville, Va.

Photographs by Madi Pere

TWO YEARS AFTER ANGELA, A TECH-nology sales professional from Indiana, and Kyle, an estate manager from New York, connected on a dating app and shared a first date in Georgetown, he proposed on a hike in Acadia National Park.

Angela says she'd always dreamed of getting married at home, so celebrating their wedding day on the couple's Virginia farm—where they also hosted the bridesmaids and groomsmen for the weekend—was extra special. That plus the packed dance floor all night, says the bride, made it the best day of her life. The pair poured their energies into the details: They'd rehabilitated the property's pond, where they took wedding photos; Kyle built the cocktail bar, wrapped around a stately tree; and small-batch jars of honey harvested from the bees he keeps served as take-home gifts. Other highlights were Angela's dress, customized with lace from her mother's wedding gown; arrangements of dahlias, a flower Angela grows more than a hundred varieties of in her own gardens; a second line to the reception; and a limoncello toast to kick off the dance party. Smash burgers made with beef from the farm, fries, and boozy milkshakes fueled the late-night celebration.



Photo credit: Scott Suchman

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DC VEGAN EVENTS

11.01.25

Jade & Adrian

Mercy Me
Washington, DC

Photographs by
Tessa Flower Photo + Video

JADE, AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST AND fitness instructor from Pennsylvania, and Adrian, a project manager and comedian from Maryland, met at a comedy show where Adrian performed. Three years after she subsequently messaged him on Instagram, he proposed on a beach in Miami. Their intimate restaurant wedding had an unconventional timeline: cocktails indoors followed by vows—officiated by a dear friend—on the patio, then dancing back inside and, later, an after-party. Instead of a plated dinner, the menu included passed hors d'oeuvres and grazing stations—the couple's favorites were the Mediterranean dips and short-rib empanadas. They decorated the restaurant with fall tones, and its "tropical modern" decor, Jade says, made the space feel sophisticated yet fun. Jade especially loved the thrifted vases for the florals; Adrian says his favorite memory is how beautiful Jade looked. Matchboxes with the date, images of the couple's cats, and other special designs served as favors.











THE DETAILS

Florist: Tessa Flower Photo + Video; Potomac Floral Wholesale

Invitations: Paperless Post

Caterer: Mercy Me

Cake: The Cakeroom

Hairstylist: Manes By Margaret

Makeup artist: The bride

Bride's attire: Delfi Collective from Anthropologie

Groom's attire: The Black Tux

Music: DJ Apsara

Videographer: Tessa Flower Photo + Video


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9.13.25

Tola & Alex

Riggs
Washington, DC

Photographs by Robert Aveau Photography

A LAWYER FROM MASSACHUSETTS AND A political fundraiser from Illinois, Tola and Alex initially met on Bumble, but it was their second meeting—a chance encounter at the Commodore in Logan Circle—that stuck. She remembers thinking he was tall and handsome but surprisingly gentle and shy; he was impressed by her confidence, brilliance, and beauty. Four years later, Alex proposed at home.

They wed in the company of 93 guests in a celebration inspired by the bride's Polish heritage and the couple's love of upscale dining and gracious gatherings. The design scheme included Boleslawiec patterns; traditional Polish pottery; a palette of delft blue, Verona sunset, marigold, and green; and airy draping that the pair say transformed the Riggs hotel's atrium room into an intimate, romantic setting. Pedestals and golden-hued florals accented the ceremony space before it was reset with dinner tables—each named for one of the couple's favorite restaurants—topped with glowing candles and a handwritten note for each guest, evoking a dinner-party ambience. After the meal, the newlyweds cut into a confection layered with dark-chocolate cake with caramel crunch and vanilla cake with strawberry and thyme.

THE DETAILS

Planning and design: Sarah Kazemburg Events & Styling

Florist: Springvale Floral

Invitations: Minted

Day-of stationery: Paper Refinery

Cake: Jisoo Cake Design (now Liberty & Jisoo)

Hairstylist: MAB Artistry

Makeup artist: Artistry by Lexi

Bride's attire: Jesus Peiro

Groom's attire: Custom by Bards Clothing

Music and lighting: Dan Goldman Events

Rentals: White Glove Rentals; BBJ La Tavola

Draping: Voile & Veil

Officiant: Rev. Mary Stone Ceremonies













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caitlynmeyer.com

Carla Pressley Hair and Makeup
@carlapressleyhairmakeup
carlapressley.com

Carl Ray Makeup Artist
@carlraymua
carlraymakeupartist.com

Conceptual Beauty
@conceptualbeauty
conceptualbeauty.com

Hair & Makeup Artistry by Claudine
@hairandmakeupbyclaudine
claudinefay.com

Hair by Remona
@hairbyremona
hairbyremona.com

JKW Beauty
@jkwbeauty
jkwbeauty.com

Olivia Lo
@olivialomakeup
olivialomakeup.com

MAB Artistry
@mab.artistry
makeupbyanab.com

Makeup by Kevan
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makeupbykevan.com

Makeup by Mimi Tran
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makeupbymimitran.com

Makeup by Pnang
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makeupbypnang.com

Makeup by Shirin
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makeupbyshirin.com

Megan Monahan
@hairandmakeupbymegsmon
megsmon.com

Carola Myers
@carolamyers
carolamyers.com

Nour Kazoun Makeup Artistry
@nour.kazoun.artistry
nourkazoun.com

Red Carpet Ready Makeup With Shauné Hayes
@redcarpetreadymakeup
redcarpetreadymakeup.com

Styled by Anna Fazio
@styledbyannafazio
styledbyannafazio.com

TressArt by Serena
@tressartbyserena
tressarthair.com

Hotels and Venues

Anderson House
CAPACITY: 130;
indoor and outdoor
2118 Massachusetts Ave., NW
societyofthecincinnati.org

Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium
CAPACITY: 600;
indoor with balcony
1301 Constitution Ave., NW
mellonauditorium.com

Autoshop at Union Market
CAPACITY: 150;
indoor with terrace
416 Morse St., NE
unionmarketdc.com

Birkby House
CAPACITY: 180;
indoor and outdoor
Leesburg
birkbyhouse.com

Chesapeake Bay Beach Club
CAPACITY: 310;
indoor, outdoor, and waterfront
Stevensville, Md.
baybeachclub.com

Conrad Washington DC
CAPACITY: 500; indoor, outdoor, and rooftop
950 New York Ave., NW
conradwashingtondc.com

Culture House
CAPACITY: 250;
indoor and outdoor
700 Delaware Ave., SW
culturehousedc.org

DAR
CAPACITY: 150;
indoor and outdoor
1776 D St., NW
dar.org

Decatur House
CAPACITY: 150;
indoor and outdoor
1610 H St., NW
whitehousehistory.org/decatur-house

Dockmaster Building at the Wharf
CAPACITY: 100;
indoor and outdoor
101 District Sq., SW
wharfdc.com/event-space

Fairmont Washington, D.C.
CAPACITY: 440;
indoor and outdoor
2401 M St., NW
fairmont.com/washington

Fathom Gallery 14th Street
CAPACITY: 72; indoor, outdoor, and rooftop
1333 14th St., NW
fathomgallery.org

Fleetwood Farm Winery
CAPACITY: 200;
indoor and outdoor
Leesburg
fleetwoodfarmwinery.com

Four Seasons
CAPACITY: 420;
indoor and outdoor
2800 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
fourseasons.com/washington

Glenstone Gardens
CAPACITY: 300;
indoor and outdoor
Middleburg
glenstonegardens.com

Goodstone Inn & Restaurant
CAPACITY: 300;
indoor and outdoor
Middleburg
goodstone.com

Hay-Adams
CAPACITY: 250;
indoor with balcony
800 16th St., NW
hayadams.com

Inn at Perry Cabin
CAPACITY: 250; indoor, outdoor, waterfront
St. Michaels
innatperrycabin.com

InterContinental Washington D.C.–The Wharf
CAPACITY: 400; indoor
801 Wharf St., SW
wharfintercontinentaldc.com

International Spy Museum
CAPACITY: 160;
indoor and rooftop
700 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
spymuseum.org

Josephine Butler Parks Center
CAPACITY: 300; indoor
1437 15th St., NW
washingtonparks.net

Kogod Courtyard at the National Portrait Gallery
CAPACITY: 850; indoor
Eighth and G sts., NW
npg.si.edu/visit/kogodcourtyard

The Line DC
CAPACITY: 500+;
indoor and rooftop
1770 Euclid St., NW
thelinehotel.com/dc

Long View Gallery
CAPACITY: 200; indoor
1234 Ninth St., NW
longviewgallerydc.com

The Manor 1858
CAPACITY: 250;
indoor and outdoor
Aldie, Va.
themanor1858.com

The Mayflower
CAPACITY: 900; indoor
1127 Connecticut Ave., NW
themayflowerhotel.com

Meridian House
CAPACITY: 150;
indoor and outdoor
1630 Crescent Pl., NW
meridian.org

The Middleburg Barn at Fox Chase Farm
CAPACITY: 350;
indoor and outdoor
Middleburg
themiddleburgbarn.com

National Museum of Women in the Arts
CAPACITY: 450; indoor
1250 New York Ave., NW
nmwa.org

Patterson Mansion
CAPACITY: 150; indoor
15 Dupont Cir., NW
pattersonmansion.com

Pendry Washington DC–The Wharf
CAPACITY: 200; indoor
655 Water St., SW
pendry.com/washington-dc

Perry Belmont House
CAPACITY: 150; indoor
1618 New Hampshire Ave., NW
ihbelmontevents.com

Potomac View Terrace at the American Pharmacists Association
CAPACITY: 250; indoor, outdoor, and rooftop
2215 Constitution Ave., NW
potomacviewterrace.com

Renwick Gallery
CAPACITY: 270; indoor
Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th St., NW
americanart.si.edu

Riggs Washington DC
CAPACITY: 120;
indoor and rooftop
900 F St., NW
riggsdc.com

River Farm at the American Horticultural Society
CAPACITY: 240;
indoor and outdoor
Alexandria
ahsgardening.org

Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center
CAPACITY: 2,000;
indoor and outdoor
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
rrbitc.com

St. Regis Washington D.C.
CAPACITY: 200;
indoor and outdoor
923 16th St., NW
stregiswashingtondc.com

Shadow Creek
CAPACITY: 300;
indoor and outdoor
Purcellville
weddingsatshadowcreek.com

The Showroom
CAPACITY: 280; indoor
1099 14th St., NW
theshowroomdc.com

Stone Tower Winery
CAPACITY: 250;
indoor and outdoor
Leesburg
stonetowerwinery.com

Supplyhouse
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50 Massachusetts Ave., NE
unionstationevents.com

Waldorf Astoria Washington DC
CAPACITY: 1,000; indoor
1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
hilton.com/en/hotels/dcawawa

Willard InterContinental
CAPACITY: 350; indoor
1401 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
washington.intercontinental.com

Woodend Sanctuary & Mansion
CAPACITY: 170; indoor and outdoor
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woodendsanctuary.org

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theblacktux.com

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Capital Custom Clothiers
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Enzo Custom
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enzocustom.com

Miguel Wilson Collection
Oxon Hill
240-451-2020
miguelwilson.com

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202-280-1742;
Tysons Galleria
571-200-3302
suitsupply.com

Tuxedo by Sarno
Alexandria
703-684-1764
tuxedobysarno.com

Music

Bachelor Boys Band
517-775-2815
bachelorboysband.com

Bialek's Music
301-340-6206
bialeksmusic.com

Black Tie Entertainment
703-803-7722
musicdj.com

Chris Laich Music Services
240-418-6207
chrislaich.com

Dan Goldman Events
202-215-3655
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District Remix
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districtremix.com

DJ Chris Stiles
(also known as Stylus Chris)
888-800-3526
elanartists.com

DJ Jake Sherman
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240-472-4569
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egudephoto.com

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erinkelleherphotography.com

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centrolinadc.com

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dauphinesdc.com

Del Mar
CAPACITY: 120
791 Wharf St., SW
202-548-7645
delmardc.com

Iron Gate
CAPACITY: 119
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202-524-5202
irongaterestaurantdc.com

Joe's Washington DC
CAPACITY: 290
750 15th St., NW
202-489-0140
joes.net

Officina
CAPACITY: 500
1120 Maine Ave., SW
202-747-5222
officinadc.com

Old Ebbitt Grill
CAPACITY: 340
675 15th St., NW
202-347-4800
ebbitt.com

Red Fox Inn & Tavern
CAPACITY: 175
2 E. Washington St.,
Middleburg
540-687-9765
redfox.com

Rose's Luxury
CAPACITY: 100
717 Eighth St., SE
202-742-3570
rosesluxury.com

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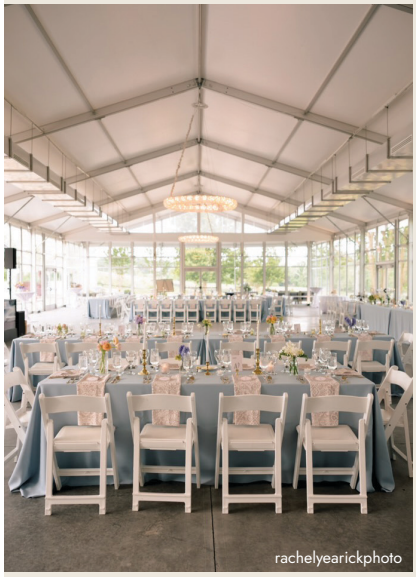
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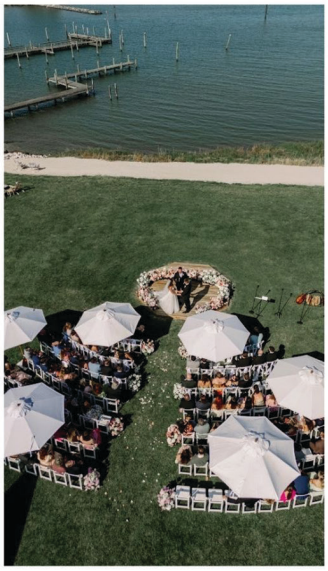
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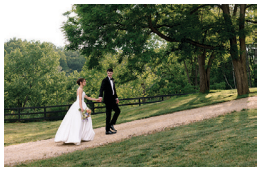
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President Lincoln's Cottage	 This beautiful, Gothic Revival mansion is the perfect backdrop for your special day. Abraham Lincoln spent a quarter of his presidency living at the Cottage. This historic venue offers indoor and outdoor spaces, tenting options, plentiful parking, and more. You'll love this bucolic retreat in the heart of DC. **202.688.3732 | 140 Rock Creek Church Rd, Washington, DC 20011 | lincolncottage.org**	**200** *indoor* **1000+** *outdoor*
Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center	 A quintessential DC wedding venue with contemporary interiors and breathtaking views overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue. Signature spaces are adorned with soaring ceilings, natural light and stunning architecture, complementing ceremonies and receptions of any style. In-house culinary team can create internationally inspired dishes and experienced event planners can make your vision a reality. **202.312.1300 | 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20004 | rrbitc.com**	**300+** *indoor* **300+** *outdoor*
Tranquility Farm & Winery	 Private Estate. Every Celebration. Entirely Yours. An estate winery with luxury wedding venues in the heart of Virginia wine country. A 19th-century Bank Barn and a floor-to-ceiling glass venue — seven ceremony settings, estate wines grown on this land, and overnight accommodations. One hour from Washington, D.C. **540.338.2027 | Purcellville, Virginia | IG: @tranquilityfarmwinery | tranquilityfarm.com**	**300** *indoor*
Wylder Hotel Tilghman Island	 Wylder is an all-inclusive, Waterfront Eastern Shore destination perfect for the wedding weekend of your dreams! Set on 9 acres, with 50 hotel rooms & over 4,000 square feet of indoor & outdoor event space. Guests can enjoy a variety of waterfront amenities all weekend long. **410.886.2121 | 21551 Chesapeake House Drive, Tilghman, MD 21671 | wylderhotels.com**	**200** *indoor* **250** *outdoor*



Engaged couples are looking here for wedding venue prospects. Don't miss the chance to sweep them off their feet with your offerings.

Contact **adinfo@washingtonian.com** for more details about future inclusion in this section.

HOME



STEPPING OUT
Turn the page for tips on where to explore around Union Market—such as Chela Mitchell Gallery, which recently hosted an exhibit on sneaker culture.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUSTIN CLIFFORD



Hi-Lawn is a popular rooftop for picnics—the menu includes such fare as pretzel bites, chips and queso, and hot dogs.

The Briefing

Union Market

Great places to eat, shop, and play in this vibrant Northeast DC neighborhood

By Kate Corliss and Sydney Carroll

UNION TERMINAL MARKET OPENED IN 1931, a centralized open-air marketplace where vendors sold fresh produce, meat, seafood, and more. Thirty years later, DC banned the outdoor sale of meat and eggs, which led to the development of a new indoor market in 1967. That venue and its surrounding neighborhood, known today simply as Union Market, has been through a lot: Aging infrastructure pushed many retailers to the suburbs in the 1980s, and a massive fire burned down much of the original warehouse in 2012. But thanks to an expansive rebuild-and-development initiative—including the arrival of La Cosecha, a first-of-its-kind indoor market celebrating the food and culture of Latin America, in 2019—the area is once again a hot spot for dining, shopping, and things to do. Here are some of our recommendations.

SHOPPING

Secondhand News

Even the building that houses **Vintage Vintage Vintage** *(1348 Fourth St., NE)* is a throwback: Libby Rasmussen and Rajni Rao opened their secondhand shop in a nearly 70-year-old former bank last September, offering a brick-and-mortar space for more than a dozen independent sellers of antique gems and original designs. Not a thrift store but a "curated destination," in the founders' words, it offers clothing, accessories, and home goods dating as far back as the 1930s. To accompany the retail, Rasmussen and Rao host community events, including DJ sets, an annual bridal show, and recently a classic-car show. Customers can buy food and drink from local businesses during weekend pop-ups—vendors have included the sourdough bakery Breadscraps and the Vietnamese coffee brand Phê.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JULEP PR

Extra Mile

FP Movement *(1256 Fourth St., NE),* the activewear label of the beloved women's boho apparel brand Free People, opened in December. Exercise junkies can stock up on chic yet functional sports bras and compression leggings or shop by activity–breezy shorts for running, skorts for pickleball, and tanks made with ultraviolet-protection fabric for hiking. Even the less athletic can find treasures in the racks, from loungewear sets to everyday sneakers.

Making Scents

The Union Market offshoot of **Olfactory NYC** *(1260 Fifth St., NE)* opened last summer, joining an existing area location in Georgetown. For $85 per scent, book an appointment with a store adviser, who will help you and up to seven friends craft your own personalized perfumes. Start by selecting a base fragrance and then choose what else to mix in–Madagascar vanilla and sandalwood, magnolia and orange blossom, or iris and cashmere are just a few options. You'll perfect the formula by testing it on paper and skin, then name and label your creation to take home.

Welcome to the Jungle

The woman-owned plant nursery **Jungle & Loom** *(1309 Fifth St., NE)* started as a pop-up in 2018 and evolved into a neighborhood mainstay. It's a place for houseplants and gardening supplies, sure, but you can also rent plants for special events. The shop offers private classes–think floral arranging, terrarium-building, or basic plant care–as well as scheduled public workshops, such as repotting demos and wreath-making tutorials. No green thumb? No problem. Art prints plus vintage rugs and glassware are among the other gift items and home decor.

Creation Station

The first location of **District Candle Lab** *(1325 Fifth St., NE)* landed in Union Market over the summer of 2024. The make-your-own-candle shop, started by Ferzan Jaeger, a former NASA physicist and founder of the gift shop Olive & Loom, sells signature soy-wax candles. Or you can make an appointment to craft a custom scent–a candle or diffuser–as a solo activity or with friends. Another event opportunity in the same space: Fawne Charm Bar welcomes private groups to design their own jewelry.

Crafting your own fragrance is a hands-on experience at Olfactory NYC.



TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF CORNETT; BOTTOM COURTESY OF OLFACTORY NYC

WHAT'S SELLING



The bustling Union Market district is largely commercial – anchored by its eponymous shopping and entertainment center – but townhouses, condos, and luxury buildings speckle the perimeter and surrounding neighborhoods. Here's some of what's sold in the past few months.

$382,500

A two-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bathroom condo with 575 square feet of space plus two balconies.

$549,000

A new two-level, four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom condo with more than 1,700 square feet of space, a balcony, and a private roof deck with Capitol and monument views.

$555,000

An 895-square-foot two-bedroom, two-bathroom unit in Union Market's newly built condo building, the Sidney.

$867,500

An updated 1,440-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bathroom end-unit rowhouse a block from Union Market.

$1,072,000

A new-construction two-level condo with three bedrooms and three bathrooms over 1,899 square feet, plus a private roof deck and assigned parking.



Drive-in (or walk-in) movies at Union Market are a summertime favorite.

Juices Flowing

Local holistic-health influencer Anahata Sabat opened **Plant Magic Bottle Shop** *(1309 Fifth St., NE)* at the beginning of last year to expand DC's nonalcoholic-beverage scene. She offers bottled mocktails and other zero-proof sips formulated with a variety of nootropics and adaptogens—such as lion's-mane mushroom for focus, ashwagandha for relaxation, and cordyceps for energy. Other wellness goodies include bath salts, gluten-free cookies, and plant-based beauty products from brands like Silver Spring's Skincando.

THINGS TO DO

Hot Wheels

Channel your inner Lewis Hamilton at **F1 Arcade** *(420 Penn St., NE)*, a virtual-race space that opened its first DC location in the fall of 2024. Play on one of more than 80 driving simulators, individually or in teams of up to six. Then enjoy live DJs, sports watch parties, trivia, and a well-appointed bar.

Perfect Harmony

Karaoke lovers can ditch the prerecorded playlist for a live soundtrack at **Sid Gold's Request Room** *(1262 Fifth St., NE)*. Tucked into an alley, this New York–born lounge arrived here in spring 2024, featuring a nightly pianist who accompanies each performer with music and backing vocals.

Farm to Table

FreshFarm Union Market District *(1298 Fifth St., NE)* kicked off in 2023. Every Sunday from 10 to 2, April through November, shop a selection of produce, baked goods, small-batch coffee, handcrafted soaps, locally distilled liquor, and much more.

Artistic License

Chela Mitchell Gallery *(1285 Fourth St., NE)*, founded in 2021 by its namesake art adviser, launched its first exhibit last summer. A collaboration with DC rapper Shy Glizzy, "You See Where I'm Coming From?" invited Black artists to showcase work paying tribute to his creative journey.

Stage Dive

A live-music haven since 2015, **Songbyrd Music House** *(540 Penn St., NE)* hosts artists from DC and beyond in its intimate 250-capacity venue. Upcoming acts include the buzzy musical duo 76th Street, Northern Virginia–bred hip-hop artist Bucky Malone, and British country-rock band Brown Horse.

Movie Magic

The indie movie theater **Angelika Film Center** *(550 Penn St., NE)* arrived at Union Market as a pop-up in 2014 and hasn't budged. Screenings range from blockbusters like *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* to anime classics. Every summer, the **Drive-In at Union Market** *(1309 Fifth St., NE)* hosts outdoor screenings. On the marquee this summer: *F1* and *Mean Girls*.

WHERE TO EAT

Raising the Bar

Sara Quinteros and Reid Shilling brought oysters back to Union Market's central bar in October—after Rappahannock Oyster Bar moved out—with **Cowbell Seafood & Oyster Bar** *(1309 Fifth St., NE)*. While oysters are the main attraction, the raw bar also offers Baltimore canyon lobster, scallop crudo, and peel-and-eat shrimp. Its loyalty club—aptly named the Chesapeake Bay Blue Oyster Cult—includes invitations to events and drink deals for a $25 fee.

French Flair

A New York City favorite founded in 1999, **Pastis** *(1323 Fourth St., NE)* made its way to DC in 2024. The restaurant emulates a Parisian bistro in taste and decor: White tiles and a tin ceiling create an ambience for French classics like steak frites, boeuf bourguignon, and duck confit. Its selection of wines also adds to the atmosphere, with Pinots, Gamays, Sorelis, and Chardonnays from regions across France.

Street Style

Meherwan Irani brought his James Beard Award–winning Indian spot, **Chai Pani** *(1325 Fifth St., NE)*, to DC last August, led by longtime friend and fellow Beard winner Vishwesh Bhatt as chef. Chai Pani brings high-end ingredients and execution to Indian street-food favorites like sabudana

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOY ASICO

vada tots, bhel puri, and chaats. Alongside specialty cocktails, including a cardamom old-fashioned, it serves nonalcoholic classics such as mango lassi, nimbu pani, and chai.

Saddle Up

Union Market marks the first area location for the country-western bar **Desert 5 Spot** *(400 Morse St., NE)*, a New York and LA favorite. The September 2025 opening brought DC its first mechanical bull along with line dancing and karaoke. Southern classics on the menu include Nashville hot chicken, smoked brisket, waffle fries, mac and cheese, and coleslaw.

Family Dinner

Karravaan *(325 Morse St., NE)*, a Michelin Guide restaurant that chef/owner Sanjay Mandhaiya opened in June 2025, takes diners on a journey through the Silk Road, combining Persian, Portuguese, Indian, and Turkish cuisines. The menu features small shareable dishes such as pork-lemongrass dumplings, chicken shawarma, and khachapuri, along with entrées meant to be shared family-style, including mushroom biryani, butter chicken, and sabzi tagine.

New Spin

The team behind some of Washington's most beloved restaurants, including Clyde's, the Tombs, and Old Ebbitt Grill, opened Spanish-inspired **Cordelia Fishbar** *(550 Morse St., NE)* in 2024. This spot departs from the company's typical Americana and dedicates itself to Iberian fish preparation, powered by its Mibrasa Parilla grill and charcoal ovens imported from Spain. Try the signature whole charcoal-roasted turbot or indulge in the raw bar, which offers half-price oysters and shellfish towers during happy hour. Finish the night with seasonal sorbets, a lavender crème brûlée, or one of 16 international whiskeys.

Big Apple Offshoot

Minetta Tavern *(1287 Fourth St., NE.)*, which was founded in New York City in 1937, expanded to DC in 2024, when the storied Parisian restaurant opened in a Union Market alley. Steakhouse favorites include grilled lamb chops, red snapper, and of course steak, alongside French bites like brandade croquettes, onion soup, and –controversially– foie gras. Upstairs, check out the Lucy Mercer Bar, named for FDR's mistress, which is reservation-only with no phones allowed. There, indulge in small bites and high-end cocktails.





Desert 5 Spot's "Walk the Line" mezcal cocktail, above, features lemon, cucumber, and mint. Singing Tiger, left, offers a full menu of pan-Asian dishes– and karaoke.

Carry a Tune

The owners of the pan-Asian restaurant and karaoke bar **Singing Tiger** *(411 New York Ave., NE)* were inspired by pop star Dua Lipa in aiming to combine an old-school vibe with the frenetic energy of a European club. The menu includes favorites from different Asian cuisines, including dan-dan noodles, bánh mì, and tonkatsu ramen. You can enjoy the fare from one of three karaoke rooms, which can be reserved for $80 to $100 an hour, depending on the night of the week. W

TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD STOW; BOTTOM BY CHONKY CAT MEDIA

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No Place Like Home

A focus on health, wellness, and self-care is creating demand for spa-like amenities at home. These eight features are among the most popular—here's what to know about them.

By Amy Moeller

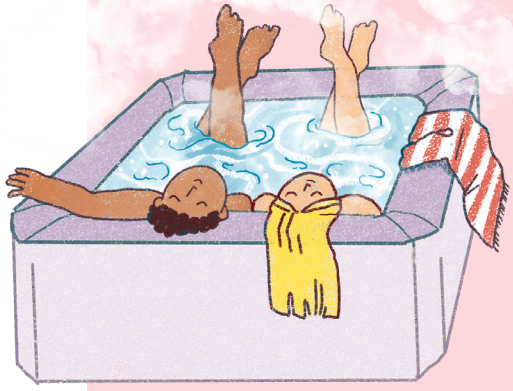
Illustrations by Alina Spatz



Home Gyms

These boomed during the pandemic and have maintained their luster.

What to know: In addition to long-loved Peloton machines and weights, more specialized equipment, like Pilates reformers, have become staples in some home gyms. Other nice features, says Marnie Oursler of Marnie Custom Homes, include well-placed mirrors, a sound system, and TVs. She also suggests rubber flooring as well as soundproofing—especially if the space is near living or sleeping spaces.



Hot Tubs

Hardly new to the market, hot tubs are experiencing a resurgence.

What to know: Self-contained and easy-to-install "off the shelf" hot tubs, says Caroline Ervin of Caroline Ervin Landscape Design, still require electrical work to ensure appropriate power, as well as a firm, level base—often achieved with the installation of a concrete pad. Proximity to the house and ease of getting in and out are keys to usability—Oursler recommends including a grab bar if the unit is recessed. A power-supply cutoff is important for safety regulations, adds Ervin. Though hot tubs are often included in pool designs, standalone versions are built for year-round use. Plus, they can double as a dipping pool when the water temperature is turned down.



Outdoor Showers

Longtime staples of beach houses, these started showing up in inland homes with pools, and they're now trending beyond that. Outdoor showers are great for the whole family after exercise or messy activities; as an opulent extension of a primary bathroom; or simply for showering en plein air or under the stars.

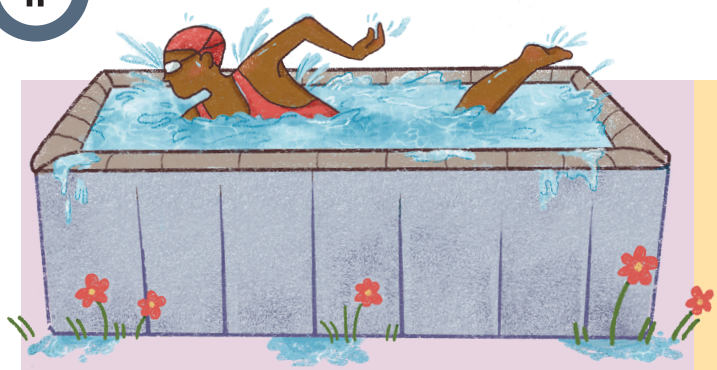
What to know: The most basic options include DIY hose-fed kits (starting around $150), which you can install in under an hour, but custom designs can include a bit more luxury. Exposed plumbing may need to be winterized for the off-months, says Ervin, and all will require some thought about how and where the water will drain. Oursler suggests considering a changing station, shelves for shampoo, and ample hooks. And when thinking about privacy from neighbors, says Ervin, "don't forget views from overhead!"

Cold Plunges

Having hit a fever pitch on social media in the past few years, this newer wellness feature is among the more niche.

What to know: Cold plunges might not be as low-maintenance as they seem. Like a pool, they require regular cleaning, filtration, and proper water chemistry, says Joseph Richardson of Richardson & Associates Landscape Architecture. He also notes that they become more valuable when paired with a sauna—a popular combination for contrast therapy. And they can be installed indoors. Interior designer Liz Potarazu of LP & Co. Design recently transformed her home's unfinished lower level into a gym and wellness area, and while she worried that the cold plunge's novelty would wear off, she has experienced the opposite: She often uses it five times a week.





Compact Pools

Pint-size pools offer respite from the heat, with a smaller footprint than a traditional pool—plus, they can be heated for extended seasonal use, may include seating, and can include jets allowing users to swim in place.

What to know: Variations include plunge pools (also called cocktail pools), swim spas (which usually feature swim-in-place technology), dipping pools, and "spools" (spa/pool combos). Those options can range from simple aboveground units (remember the DIY "stock-tank pools" that boomed a few years ago?) to custom, in-ground styles with concrete surrounds, fire features, landscaping, and lighting. The latter type, says Richardson, can start around $100,000. Whatever you choose, Oursler cautions that the cover you buy is key: Many are so cumbersome that people end up rarely using the pools at all, so automatic styles are ideal. And, she adds, make sure you have easy access to equipment—nets, filters, and such—so the pool is easy to maintain.

Circadian Lighting

Another wellness trend, this style of lighting is meant to boost productivity and sleep health by mimicking the progression of sunlight.

What to know: Circadian lighting systems use dimmers, timers, and varying warmth levels to replicate natural light, and because there are no clouds or other filters, they're reportedly more effective than the light from windows. While buzzy, these systems aren't widely prevalent yet. And they're expensive: manual-switch or smart bulbs are available for about $15 to $60 each, but top-of-the-line, fully automated setups can cost as much as $1,000 per recessed bulb.

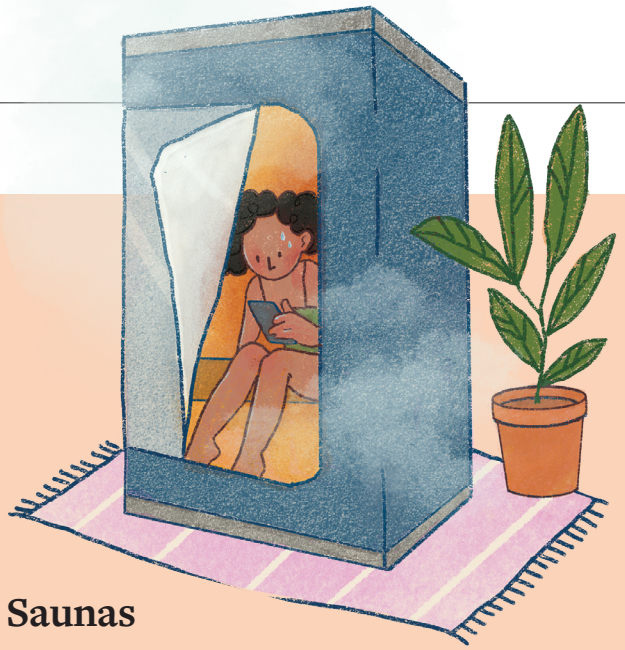




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Saunas

Touting benefits for muscle, cardiovascular, and joint health as well as relaxation, indoor and outdoor home saunas are becoming increasingly popular.

What to know: You can install these inside or out, though Richardson says the outdoor units tend to be more practical and economical. When choosing or designing one, Oursler recommends opting for benches long enough to lie down on; wiring the sauna for music (phones, she notes, overheat within 15 minutes); ensuring the ability to turn them on remotely from your phone (convenient, she says, because saunas can take 30 minutes to heat up); and considering the proximity to (or addition of) a shower, to avoid having to make a long, sweaty trek through the house.

Spa-Like Bathrooms

Many new and updated bathrooms claim to be spa-inspired, but people are continually raising the bar on what that means.

What to know: At a minimum, a spa bathroom these days has heated floors, ambient lighting, and often a bidet. Right now, steam showers – sometimes with aromatherapy – are having their own major moment. Beyond that, there's growing interest in wellness amenities such as a cold plunge, access to an outdoor shower off a balcony or rooftop, and a sauna. Looking to start small? You can install a basic bidet seat (like the popular Tushy brand) or LED lighting strips for a few hundred dollars plus an hour or two of time. W





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Off the Market!

A peek inside some of Washington's recent high-end residential transactions

DC



1 **WHERE:** Kalorama.
BOUGHT BY: Allison B. Smith, strategic-outreach and visits manager at Google, and Stephen B. Smith, partner at the communications firm Purple Strategies.
LISTED: $4,850,000.
SOLD: $4,625,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 15.
BRAGGING POINTS: A 1920s brick Colonial on





a double lot with five bedrooms, five bathrooms, a study, a sunroom, a recreation room, a swimming pool, a two-level pool house, and a pergola.

WHERE: Forest Hills.
BOUGHT BY: Chantale Fiebig, a partner at the law firm Weil, and Julian Haynes, a nonprofit manager.
LISTED: $5,125,000.
SOLD: $5,125,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 2.
BRAGGING POINTS: A Craftsman on a corner lot with seven bedrooms, six and a half bathrooms, three fireplaces, a home gym, a thousand-plus-bottle wine cellar and tasting table, a flagstone patio, and a rear garden with a water feature.

MARYLAND

WHERE: Bethesda.
SOLD BY: Jill Snyder Granader, communications director at the investment firm Cambridge Information Group.
LISTED: $4,995,000.
SOLD: $4,850,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 1.
BRAGGING POINTS: A 10,700-square-foot Colonial/French-style house with six bedrooms, six bathrooms, two half baths, a two-story library, a heated pool, a sport court, and multiple patios.

2 **WHERE:** Bethesda.
BOUGHT BY: Obibobi Ndu, chief information and digital officer at Otto Aerospace, and Adora Ndu, chief regulatory-affairs officer at BridgeBio.
LISTED: $4,500,000.
SOLD: $4,500,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 0.
BRAGGING POINTS: A two-acre estate with six bedrooms, seven bathrooms, two half baths, six fireplaces, a two-story foyer, a library, an indoor sport court, a guest suite, and three stone terraces.

3 **WHERE:** Bethesda.
BOUGHT BY: Jonathan Schilit, an entrepreneur, and Jenna Schilit, director of Bethesda Dance Center.
LISTED: $4,500,000.
SOLD: $4,500,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 13.
BRAGGING POINTS: A renovated Craftsman with seven bedrooms, eight and a half bathrooms, a sunroom, a barn-inspired kitchen, a home gym with a sauna, and a heated swimming pool.

VIRGINIA

WHERE: McLean.
SOLD BY: Giovanna M. Cinelli, deputy general counsel at the Pentagon.
LISTED: $4,840,000.
SOLD: $4,750,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 2.
BRAGGING POINTS: An 11,000-square-foot house with seven bedrooms, seven bathrooms, two half baths, a conservatory, a library, a home cinema, a heated pool with a waterfall hot tub, and a tennis court.

4 **WHERE:** McLean.
BOUGHT BY: William Parker Quinby, vice chairman and co–regional manager of the commercial real-estate brokerage firm Savills.
LISTED: $4,300,000.
SOLD: $4,100,000.
DAYS ON MARKET: 10.
BRAGGING POINTS: A three-level house surrounded by trees with six bedrooms, five and a half bathrooms, two fireplaces, a billiards room, a screened porch, and a rear deck. W

Sales information provided by Bright MLS.



PHOTOGRAPHS ON OPPOSITE PAGE BY MONUMENT STUDIOS; THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT BY DEREK & VICTORIA MILLER; TOP RIGHT BY TOWNSEND VISUALS; BOTTOM BY BTW IMAGES



CONTINUED FROM **PAGE 49**

fans who take issue with his changing life and the ways that manifests on Instagram. They gripe that he's gotten too big or is doing too much content that feels unrelatable. Why, he wonders, do they resent his success?

I tell Tony they probably don't see him as a person. How could they? He's just another character on the feed, a twentysomething consultant in DC, in a show where the audience can give real-time feedback. But on TV, on a bright set with a makeup team and commercial breaks and primary colors everywhere, maybe that will be different. Maybe he and the audience will both understand that it's all artifice—that Tony exists separately from Anthony John, from the brands, from the fans, from the very online world they all inhabit.



drewbaranello
This looks depressing man, put the phone down and enjoy life

Tony sounds almost desperate to find out, like he's winding up to throw one last Hail Mary before his 25 minutes expire. "I know I can do this," he says. "I just got to hit this one more time. If I just get a concept, then I'll be in that room with the Amelia Dimoldenbergs and the Sean Evanses. And [Ryan] Seacrest. I've just got to find that open receiver."

Ideally, Tony wants—well, it's hard to say exactly what he wants. Maybe that's part of the problem. Over the months we spoke, he floated a number of goals. Be a broadcaster. A talk-show host. A game-show host. Have a podcast. Have a whole podcast network. Be the modern Regis Philbin, Conan O'Brien, Mister Rogers. At one point, I asked him if he wanted to run for office one day. He gave a long answer that didn't contain the word "no."



tdmoore66
It must be exhausting to feel the need to constantly create staged content....

Mostly, he just wants a chance to be *bigger*. "There isn't very much I wouldn't do for an opportunity like that," he says. "I will crawl over hot coals. I'll travel every day of the year. I'll get three hours of sleep a night if I have to. I do define myself by my craft. My dream occupation is part of me, and it always will be. I do judge myself on my work, and I always will."

Tony pauses. "My therapist, all the time, will go, 'You shouldn't do that.' Well, I don't really care."

And if it doesn't work out?

"I get scared about how I might handle it."

IN LATE MARCH, PEOPLE START sending me links, all to the same post. The man on the screen stands in a parking lot, head tilted and eyebrows raised, his arms bent like he's doing a crotch chop. His hands and groin are blurred. The caption reads: "A Reveal unlike any other drops tomorrow." The hog, it seems, is nigh. The comments are ecstatic.

Im screaming.

This will be the greatest day of my life.

Thanks for the heads up, Tone. I've got one day to get my wife off here.

Tony has always been afraid that people close to him will abandon him. When he was young, his dad and mom split, and after she remarried, money was tight and things could get tense. So he developed a habit. He'd move slowly, lie down on the carpet to make sure the stairs wouldn't creak under his weight, and listen to his mom and stepdad. "Just to see if everything was okay," he says. "And if they were okay, then I was okay."

Tony also remembers, as a child, being aware that his great-aunt—a grandmotherly figure to him—was dying, but he never wanting to admit it to himself. Then one day at church, while the congregants were giving the sign of peace, he turned to her and burst into tears: *I love you. Don't leave me.*

"I think a lot of that stuff has created a reflex in me," Tony says. "Please love me. Please like me. Don't abandon me. Stop unfollowing me."

On the big day, Tony posts again. It's the same picture but with the blurred area clear. There is no hog. Instead, Tony is holding the TravisMathew NuAge Mega golf shoe. Swipe to the next slide and there's a surf-rock-soundtracked montage of Tony hitting golf shots. He's doing a voiceover with his best Jim Nantz impression: "A spiked traction system that creates maximum grip and stability as I clear the hips and drive into the ball."

Recently, Tony's stuff had been generating minimal attention—50 to 100 comments, 400 or 600 or 900 likes. But the returns on this stunt are good, for both the teaser post and the reveal. Tony is back in the thousands. The comment section is buzzing. When we talk, he's amped: "Years ago, when I first started, I would probably go on a run with a million-plus views per post for, like, a couple months.



justinkaram99
Make it stop please

That's how the algorithm used to work. Now you can have that many views and then go back down to 80,000 the next day. It's so different now. It really makes you earn it. So it was good to get back to that.

"And, look, it also makes me more palatable to other companies."

For a long time, Tony was hesitant to lean into the hog stuff. It seemed crude. Off-brand. It was "nasty, locker-room humor," he says, the kind of unvibrant masculinity the haters wanted. Only now that he's broken the seal, Tony sounds happy. Maybe he should be. He says he was paid around $12,000 for the posts—not exactly Kardashian money but enough to cover rent and then some.

And yet: This was a chip that Tony could cash in only once. The "reveal" will not go viral a second time. There can't *be* a second time. All of the comments, all of the cruel schoolyard taunts exploding in scale since the algorithm first chose him: This was the price for everything. Was it worth it?

Tony seems to brush my question off. Yeah, he says, he could have held out for $50,000, maybe even $100,000. But tonight, at least, those aren't the numbers on his mind. "It felt really good," he says, "to go viral again." W

Chris Almeida is a writer and editor whose work has appeared in the New Yorker, the New York Times Magazine, and the Believer. An Arlington native, he currently lives in Brooklyn.

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PETS



What Steven Eskew Has Seen Helping Fearful Drivers Get Across the Bay Bridge

An anxious construction worker, a woman curled into a cocoon, a ride-along goat, and more



"The majority of customers sit and enjoy the view—they just don't like driving the bridge," says Eskew. "A lot of them say they feel they're more of a danger to somebody else than themselves."

MARYLAND'S FOUR-MILE-LONG, 186-FOOT-HIGH CHESAPEAKE Bay Bridge is nightmare fuel if you're even a tiny bit squeamish about crossing bridges over open water. At one time, the Maryland Transportation Authority provided free rides across the span. That ended in 2007, and private companies took over—including Kent Island Express, which Steven Eskew has run since 2013. For $45 cash ($55 with a credit card), he or a member of his team will hop into your driver's seat at a gas station near the bridge, give you a lift, and drop you off on the other side. Here, Eskew talks about what it's like to help motorists across this daunting structure and what he's observed about fear.

"I GREW UP ON A LITTLE island called Turkey Point. It's right on the water, and I used to fish underneath the Bay Bridge. [What I do now] sounds like just getting in somebody's car, driving back and forth, but when you have four cars show up at once or there's an accident on the bridge or something falls off a truck—you're dealing with anxiety.

"After Covid, people's anxiety increased twentyfold. That's when our business really amped up. During the winter, unless it's super nasty, we're doing at least 10 to 12 cars a day. The end of March, because people get spring fever, 12 to 15. In summer, we've hit 45. We have regulars. They come every week. A construction worker—six-foot-four, 300 pounds—used the service for 14 years. We have two attorneys, five psychologists. The newest one [is a pilot] for the State Department. It's men, women, young, old, Black, white. People also take their animals. Dogs, cats, birds, snakes. We had a goat in the car one time.

"The majority of customers sit in the passenger seat and enjoy the view—they just don't like driving the bridge. A lot of them say they feel they're more of a danger to somebody else than themselves. Then you get the ones that can't look out. When I took over the business, I had a lady freak out on me. There was a huge truck, and we were following it. Then some jackass came flying past and went in between the oversized load and the wall. The lady screamed and dug her nails into my arm. She drew blood.

"The other [story] that's fascinating to me was this lady from New York or New Jersey—I remember the accent. I'm watching her out of the corner of my eye, and she's turning around in her seat, her face toward the headrest. All of a sudden, she pulls this blanket up over top of her and completely becomes a cocoon. I'm patting her on her shoulder, like, 'You're gonna be fine.' She was just kind of moaning. We pull up on the side of the exit ramp [so she can] drive away. She starts walking back toward the bridge, cussing the bridge out: 'F--- you! I hate you!' "

—AS TOLD TO KATE CORLISS

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