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2020

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FOR ALL



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We want your help! Tell us where you'd like to see *The Observer* - a favorite coffee shop, neighborhood restaurant, store, or community space. We're expanding our distribution in WV's Eastern Panhandle and we're open to suggestions.

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Bushel & Peck
Mama Jo's (Ranson Civic Center)
Martin's Supermarket

HARPERS FERRY

Bakerton Market
Hamilton's Tavern 1840
River Riders
Vintage Lady

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Bavarian Inn
Blue Moon Cafe
Green Pineapple
Food Lion
LellyBelle
Sweet Shop

JEFFERSON COUNTY

Black Dog Coffee (Shenandoah Jct)
Middleway Market

BERKELEY COUNTY

Daily Grind
Good Natured Collective
Martin's Supermarket

// WV PERSPECTIVES



Amidst the blue ridge mountains, there are remarkable expressions of life. — Anthony Harkins

Do you have a story to tell?
An image in mind? An idea to share?
A question to ask?

The Observer provides a platform for the voices of West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. We are looking for writers & photographers, storytellers & artists, fresh insights & new perspectives to highlight the tapestry of our community.

If you are interested in participating,
we invite you to email us at:
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Sunday Mornings behind the Library
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Opening Thoughts

This issue marks the change in ownership of The Observer from Mike Chalmers to Steve & Harriet Pearson.

COMING HOME TO WEST VIRGINIA, the pulse slows and the mind eases when I crest the Blue Ridge at Keys Gap or cross alongside the Shenandoah River. When Mike Chalmers showed me the image overlooking Harpers Ferry (opposite page) it reminded me that this is where “almost heaven” begins and why we call this place home. We plan to continue these WV Perspectives each month — feel free to share an image that reminds you of our state.

Harriet and I are grateful that Mike agreed to share *The Observer* with us. He’s done an amazing job shaping it over the past four years and we hope to be able stewards of this newspaper. We see *The Observer* as a platform to amplify the voices of West Virginia, particularly from our communities in the Eastern Panhandle. Our task will be to identify the issues relevant to the community, to ask the essential questions, and to inform the discussion and debate — based on facts. We won’t presume to have the answers, but we can offer honest perspectives.

The Observer will continue to highlight the people, the businesses of the region as they rise to the challenges ahead. We’ll also celebrate the creative culture that thrives here and the artists, artisans, musicians and performers who enrich our spirits. The land and food that sustains us will be part of the story as well. West Virginia has many main streets, and we intend to spotlight how our local economy works to sustain and expand opportunities to keep our communities thriving. Likewise, we hope to shine a light on our local and state governments, to inform and encourage citizens to engage.

As Harriet and I started down this path in early May, we focused on the theme of “reopening” for our first issue— thinking about the relaunch of *The Observer* as well as the reopening of public spaces, organizations and businesses as they adapt to survive the health and economic disruptions visited by the Covid-19 pandemic. But we now find ourselves witnessing another turning point in history — one that has us thinking about the unfinished conversations that need to be re-opened. Our feature this month shares a few of the many voices that need to be heard. We look forward to an open discussion, one we hope will lead to enduring change.



Steve Pearson
EDITOR IN CHIEF

TO OUR READERS

We’d like to hear from you. Tell us what stories you want us to explore, what questions you want us to ask, and where we should focus.



SUGGESTIONS?

With our commitment to explore the issues affecting the communities in WV’s Eastern Panhandle, we welcome guidance from our readers.

SHARE WITH US

Connect us to the artists, craftspeople, musicians, merchants, restaurants, events and places that you enjoy and want us to share with the community.

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// FEATURE

400 YEARS

8 MINUTES, 46 SECONDS

LOCAL LEADERS SPEAK OUT ON RACISM

ARTICLE BY: Rich Goodman, Staff Writer



George Floyd was murdered on May 25. The next day protesters took to the streets in Minneapolis, and every day since then protests have roared through the streets of every state in the United States. Around the globe, people have united to echo this call for change, not only in support of the protesters in America but also to call-out and address similar issues in their own societies. After countless years of

activism, a majority of the American population is finally beginning to see through the literal smoke. Unchecked police brutality took the lives of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and armed White predators took the life of Ahmaud Arbery. Their lives mattered. Black Lives Matter. Although these are the names in our hearts today, the story of pervasive, systemic racism in our country is not a new one.

In our own community, local voices are sharing this story — their story — and asking us to listen.

The Most Durable American Institution

“This moment has a newness to it, but it’s not new,” stated Adonijah Gilmore. Gilmore is a local activist who attended the Charles Town protest and spoke at the Shepherdstown protest, both in early June. “Racism has been durable,” added Gilmore. “It looked like slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, voter suppression, gerrymandering, redlining, and police violence. The difference is that now we have social media and phones to amplify truths that we previously may have only been able to see on the news.”

Another resonating voice in the crowd was Vanessa Furby who, in addition to lending her energy to the Charles Town protest, has also been using social media to share her personal experiences and educate others. “For centuries, there have always been distractions,” said Furby. “This time something terrible happened, and all the world could do was watch and listen. Quarantine forced the world to stop.”

Dr. Chiquita Howard-Bostic, Chair of the Sociology Department at Shepherd University, has dedicated much of her life and career to educating about issues like these though her position as a tenured professor as well as founder of Help Bridge, a leadership education and social justice training organization. She was recently named associate vice-president for diversity, equity and inclusivity at the University. “The global definition of Blackness is an environmental identity and a social reality,” said Howard-Bostic. “These events have left a more vivid public view of real examples, and it has become a personal responsibility whether we each want to understand the history and appreciate its deeper meaning. We have gone through different articulations of how we address people’s color, from simply being recognized as human beings, pushing further for diversity and tolerance, and now moving toward multiculturalism and respect.”

Seeing Color

Reverend Ernest Lyles is another longstanding educator of multiculturalism and social activism. Lyles is a life member of the NAACP, founder and first Director of Multicultural Student Services at Shepherd College (now Shepherd University), and a minister and mentor for several churches and social programs throughout West Virginia and D.C. “What’s the problem with seeing color?”



Adonijah Gilmore



Dr. Howard-Bostic

asked Lyles. “What I see is someone who brings something into our relationship that’s unique, and I appreciate that. We need to have open and honest conversations about race for us to understand racism and the impact that it’s having on our society.”

Howard-Bostic shared a similar perspective, “If you say that you are colorblind, you are saying that you decided not to see, not understanding that color is part of culture. You can’t begin to respect until you have access to education. Not knowing is no longer an excuse – Google it! Ask more questions and provide space to listen. Your particular interpretation of this reality is based upon your past experience and what you believe you know. Be kind, be present, and participate – that’s where cultural integration comes in.”

Listen Deep

Gilmore also shared the importance of listening and learning. “I’ve always believed that ignorance is ok at first, because it simply means not knowing,” he asserted. “When you are presented with the true experience, what are you going to do? Take the time to really understand what we are saying.” The Black Lives Matter Movement has inspired a great deal of support, and has also been met with a great deal of resistance. “What has been discouraging is the continued lack of understanding,” added Furby, “the continued chant of indifference, like ‘All Lives Matter’”

“People conclude that the words Black Lives Matter mean that other lives don’t matter,” Lyles said. “What Black Lives Matter is intended to

“

... KEEP HAVING THOSE
TOUGH CONVERSATIONS
EVERYWHERE ...

—ADONIJAH GILMORE

”

mean is that our lives matter just as much as other lives. They overlook all of that and say ‘All Lives Matter’, even if they don’t believe it.” Howard-Bostic noted this misconception as well. “Black Lives Matter is not looting or burning things down,” she said. “Black Lives Matter is about generating understanding about unethical treatment of people of color. It almost seems that some justify not participating by giving it another meaning. But it’s not just the people, it’s the showcasing of the movement in our public forums that have established what is happening, and some of that is on purpose.”

Furby also spoke on the misrepresentation that results from the “media’s desire to distract from the cause and focus on destruction. Though it’s discouraging to see these insensitive, ignorant, hurtful reactions to the recent BLM movement, it’s also insightful. The racists are rearing the ugly face of hate that’s been harboring in their heart. The world is watching, and it’s easier to fight an enemy we can see.” Howard-Bostic stated, “People have to be able to remove the two separate conversations of looting and the death of Black people to understand what’s going on in different bubbles. This is the cumulative effect of years of pain, and villainizing the entire movement won’t help anything. We need to focus on smaller parts, and compartmentalize some of these issues to have moments of progress, kind moments, unified moments.”

Removing the ‘Force’ from Law Enforcement

The use of phrases such as ‘Black Lives Matter’ and recently ‘defund the police’ often result in reflex responses of volatility and defensiveness before the true message has a chance to be taken up in meaningful discussion. Within a country that has been habitually quick to task law enforcement with responding to any and all issues, but historically slow to recognize that a simplistic focus on maintaining public order provides no

// FEATURE

real solutions, offering any sort of alternative vision of criminal justice is instantly met with resistance. Assumptions are made and a defense is built before the conversation begins. Gilmore explains, “Defund the police means reallocating resources and funds, and implanting that into schools, healthcare, housing, and employment. The goal is still to reduce crime and build community.” Gilmore also made the point that defunding education happens frequently, which is likely a contributing factor to social problems potentially leading to more crime.

Racism Without Intent Still Injures

These systemic issues extend far beyond a lack of awareness of social campaigns or overt expressions of racism. The prejudices associated with the global definition of Blackness are present at work, on social media, and around the dinner table. Passive or muted racism such as racist jokes and microaggressions “are just contemporary expressions of racism,” asserted Howard-Bostic. “The challenge is that people are communicating using everyday language, and they don’t understand that institutional racism has become embedded into other things. They don’t understand that it causes stress and pain and damage, threatening people’s confidence and knowledge-building process.”

Gilmore emphasized that these acts “subtract from authentic experiences and feelings that Black people have, even if they laugh with you. People who I thought supported me when I had no voice or used my voice just to make them laugh aren’t listening now. Always be open to feedback – if someone tells you that an innuendo is complicit in racism, you need to be able to accept that. It’s not about how you meant it, it’s about the meaning of it. Language is important. Once you feel that empathy and respect, you won’t feel like you need to use racism for a joke. If you still do, you’re just not that funny.”

A Daily Effort

While education about the realities of systemic racism in our society is a collective responsibility, the continued momentum of this movement has always depended upon the time and energy of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities (including those lending voices to this article). Activism may be widely featured in conversation right now, but these experiences are lived every day for many individuals, even when the topic is not trending.



“These conversations that people are having are about my life,” said Howard-Bostic. “Every day, I am constantly code-switching, changing my tone, vocabulary, and demeanor to interact with different populations. But I have the ability to make decisions that my grandmother and mother could not. As a college-educated African American woman, I have agency – the capacity and freedom to act and move. I can make a decision and I won’t be punished for that. More African Americans can protest in a non-violent way using advocacy rather than in-person protests. Then there are White friends who have stepped up using their privilege and voices to help engage the in-person non-violent marches and protests. When laying on the ground is the most effective way that you can protest without being taunted and agitated to turn a non-violent protest into something else, agency and choice of action are important.”

Adding Voices

Furby, Gilmore, and Lyles also expressed an appreciation for the changing socio-cultural demographics of those standing against racial injustice and prejudice. “It’s been extremely encouraging to see that many different people from so many different backgrounds, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, socioeconomic statuses, and countries have followed suit in protesting for Black lives,” said Furby. Gilmore explained that seeing crowds stand in solidarity has been moving, but he also has recognized more advocates “asking what they can do, and holding their closest people accountable to what they never identified as

racism – even going as far as relinquishing relationships. I can’t appreciate enough how many people have stood with me and for me.”

All noted that although efforts from allies can be valuable, it’s important for individuals to constantly remind themselves and others to revisit the true message, keeping in mind that perceived intentions do not always align with the impact of actions. They encourage individuals to use their own voice and energy to lift the message of communities most affected by systemic racism, but to be cautious to not appropriate the message in a way that changes its meaning. They welcome the many new voices to add power to the message, with the hope that people can put aside their assumptions and interpretations, to avoid diluting its potency.

Share The Burden

“There is a lack of understanding of who ethnic minority people are. Some people may try to impose their way of life onto other people,” stated Lyles. Furby encouraged White allies to first appreciate that “they will never know what it is like to grow up in the environment in which Black people currently live. Saying anything along the lines of ‘I know how you feel’ or ‘I’ve been treated the same way’ as a White person is provoking.” Gilmore explained, “A desire to figure out what you can do is a start, but this begins with self-education, not what somebody is going to give to you. There are great books, documentaries, and messages that really articulate and elaborate what Black and Brown people are saying now and have been saying for the last 400 years.”

“The only way to keep this momentum going is to continue to schedule marches, speeches, forums, and vigils,” asserted Furby, “keep having those tough conversations everywhere.” Gilmore added, “If we’re serious about eliminating systemic racism, we have to immediately repeal qualified immunity. We need to eliminate departmental quotas for pulling people over. We need to ban private prisons. We need to remove the incentives to treat Black and Brown people unfairly.”

Gilmore provided one more call to action: “I challenge any ally to learn about the complicated negligence in our history. Dig deep, try to understand, discover all of our heroes like Fred Hampton, Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, and Bobby Seale. Whenever you think you have a grasp on it, go deeper. No human is without worth or redemption, and you don’t know until you know. And when you do know, stand in solidarity with us so that we can work together.” 📌

// WELLNESS

COPING & CONNECTING

Mental Health in the Pandemic

As a mental health clinician, I see firsthand the importance of attending to mental health in our lives and communities. The pandemic has presented new challenges for how mental health providers and clients connect, but the need for support is still there and providers are adapting. *The Observer* asked me to share some insight on how services have changed (or are continuing) and to highlight some of the local practitioners who are accepting new clients.

– Wendy Baraka, LCSW

MELANCHOLY

An expression of the emptiness the artist experienced after the death of his wife from breast cancer. György has publicly welcomed the comfort his sculpture brings to people who are suffering from loss and sadness.

Sculpture by Albert György. Copper & Tin. Installed at Quai du Mont Blanc, Lake Geneva, Switzerland.



Photo credit: Velour Noire / Shutterstock.com

“All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble. They can never be solved but only outgrown.”
—C.G. Jung (*Collected Works, Volume 13, para.18*)



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NURTURE AND BALANCE

Nicholas Trietsch, LICSW
& Bianca Stevens, CCNA

Nicholas and Bianca were early to embrace tele-health options. “We started doing tele-health during the past year and when the pandemic hit, a number of colleagues actually came to us so they could understand how to coordinate services,” stated Trietsch.

Looking to serve the needs of the community, Trietsch and Stevens have been assisting people who identify as transgender, non-binary, or other, more expansive ranges of gender and sexual identity. In support of this effort, they have trained

and partnered in the community with members of Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church to develop an LGBTQ+ Youth Group. This much needed program provides support in an affirming and safer space to LGBTQ+ youth and has been up and running since January, meeting weekly and serving up to 15 members.

The practice also maintains its commitment to serving people of color. “Ultimately with COVID-19, as people’s resiliency decreases and their frustration and stress increases, that has been a great catalyst for moving forward with and trying to process social justice and equity issues,” states Trietsch. He sees the power of words and ideas, and the value of counseling as a safe place to explore their effect.

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// WELLNESS CONT.



SUMMIT HEALTHWORKS

Kelli Manzano, LCSW

Talking about tele-health options, Manzano had already started offering this option in her practice to increase access for clients with medical or transportation barriers. Prior to the pandemic Manzano would have said meeting face-to-face in her office was still her preference for treatment, but the experience of the past few months has increased her appreciation for a hybrid model of service. “I think it does a world of good bridging skills from the office to implementation in the home. It boosts the efficacy of putting new skills into practice in everyday life. Plus, I get to see everyone’s cats and dogs and it is awesome. You would think it would be more impersonal, but people are literally inviting me into their home, and they show me their projects and their animals and their flower beds.”

“As a therapist, I want to make sure that a client’s perspectives are heard and I think that’s what all people need right now -- a safe space to be able to talk through the thoughts and feelings about what’s going on right now.”

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CALLAHAN COUNSELING SERVICES & PALOMA CRISIS STABILIZATION AND DETOX CENTER

Pete Callahan, LICSW, ADC-S, MAC, CCFC, ICADC

Pete specializes in addiction counseling and program development. Callahan has concerns about the relapse risk among those working toward recovery from substance abuse. “It’s a horrible time with people having to be at home, facing hardship and boredom. Things can get out of control pretty quickly. I don’t think we’ll really know the impact until the dust settles.” Fortunately, he has been able to use video conferencing technology to continue intensive outpatient programs including support groups and a DUI program.

Callahan credits his dedicated staff for ensuring the continuity of care through the COVID-19 pandemic. At CCS, clients are served both virtually and in-person with precautions including monitoring temperatures and sanitizing between appointments.

Callahan Counseling Services: phone 304-886-4118, web www.callahancounselingservices.com

Paloma Crisis Stabilization and Detox Center: phone 304-579-4455, web www.callahancounselingservices.com



JACK CHILDERS, LPC

Childers operates an independent practice with offices in Shepherdstown and Leesburg and specializes in working with couples and individuals. When asked about his observations on the effects of COVID-19 on his clients, he said “It’s hard to make a generalization. Some couples continue to move forward with separation plans, and others have gotten closer.” Frustrations about social limits as well as anxiety about going back to work and social activities are common themes.

Childers made the switch to tele-health in March and he has noted the simplification and flexibility of scheduling. He is attentive to the privacy issues that arise when a client is receiving services in their home with other family members present. Childers recognizes this format for counseling may be here to stay, but looks forward to it being the patient’s choice and integrated with the traditional in-person sessions.

Jack Childers, LPC: phone 703-771-4041, web www.jackchilderslpc.com

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// COMMUNITY

FEEDING KIDS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Community Combined Ministries



For community service organizations, the pandemic & economic crisis have forced drastic changes to operations and funding — even as these groups are called to meet needs on a scale they’ve never experienced.

IN 2007, DIANA WALL FOUND HERSELF called to a mission. Working with Community Combined Ministries, she founded a program to source, assemble and distribute food packages through the Jefferson and Berkeley County School Districts. Kidz Power Pacs (KPP for short) is designed to provide children food for weekends and school breaks, filling a gap not served by weekday, in-school nutrition programs funded by the government.

For the last 13 years, 100 to 250 volunteers have gathered once a month at Eagle School Intermediate in Martinsburg to fill these Pacs with easy-to-prepare meals that kids can heat themselves. Schools identify the meal needs, parents approve what kids receive and the assembled Pacs are delivered through the school system.

For the ministry, the group packing effort served to nurture the community of volunteers as much as it sustained the logistics of the operation. The operation ran smoothly until mid-March of this year when restrictions on large gatherings forced Dianna Wall to close the public packings. But completely suspending the program was not an option for Diana, so she persevered: “For the first seven weeks, it was just me and a few others packing every day, all day, even on Sunday.” Wall explained that “all day” often meant spending 11 hours or more on packing. Now the packing days are shorter and the size of volunteer groups is limited by invitation to stay within the guidelines on public gatherings.

Before the pandemic-related restrictions began, the school systems handled the distribution of Pacs to 1,000 kids in Jefferson and

Berkeley counties. When schools closed, the logistics of distribution quickly became more complicated. Due to privacy guidelines, the schools could not simply turn over a list of recipients for volunteers to deliver. Fortunately, the school systems stepped up to the challenge. Bus drivers in Jefferson County continued to deliver the Pacs from March through May. In Berkeley County, school counselors made the deliveries. Wall says just between March and May KPP and its volunteers have supplied 252,000 meals for those 1000 kids identified by the school systems.

Without the use of school buildings, the packing location has moved around. Charles Town Baptist Church gave KPP space for several weeks, but volunteers mostly set up the supplies in the morning, pack all day and bring remaining supplies home at night. “We need at least 5,000 feet of open space to pack, store, and access for our delivery teams,” explained Wall.

“Finding the food was a huge ordeal,” she says. “Thankfully, we put in extra orders before the shutdown.” Community Combined uses mostly packaged foods, but with stores restricting bulk purchases and supply disruptions, the organization has shifted to online ordering. Wall says they have been able to find the food they need, but it’s more expensive. In the four months since the shutdown in March, the organization has spent \$73,000 on food, over half of their annual budget.

Typically, Community Combined is funded by individual and church donations. Both have been reduced by the stay-at-home orders. They received a \$4,500 grant from Eastern West Virginia Community Foundation. Sam’s Club and United Way have donated, and a local family’s foundation graced the ministry with \$10,000.

If the next school year is not a traditional one, Wall expects KPP to soon be filling an even larger gap that school meal programs will not be covering. Wall will be spending the summer figuring out how to adjust the services, how to adjust the budget and how to raise additional funds.

The Community Combined Ministries website (CommunityCombined.org) has information on how to donate and support this program.

ARTICLE BY: Amy Hiatt

// COMMUNITY

NAVIGATING THE PANDEMIC LANDSCAPE

Shepherdstown Community Club



Earlier this year, *The Observer* invited the Shepherdstown Community Club to share some thoughts on its 75th Anniversary. As an institution that literally sits astride the heart of Shepherdstown, we thought it appropriate to ask them to update their story, in their own words, to share some insight on how the pandemic is affecting our community institutions.

WITH THE INSTALLATION of newly elected board officers and several new board members, the Shepherdstown Community Club (SCC) was poised for a whirlwind of activity to kick off 2020. Reservations were pouring in for the War Memorial Building (WMB) and Morgan's Grove Park (MGP) was booking up for a full schedule of family picnics, weddings, and other uses. Enthusiastic members were eager for the New Year and all it promised! And somewhere, far away, a melody was playing softly as we waited for the grass to grow and leaves to emerge.

Closer to home, a symphony of happy notes played against a backdrop of community events celebrating traditions of the past while also enthusiastically welcoming new ideas. The board had already completed several initiatives that would be sure to make 2020 a year of vision. Indeed, the board had begun realizing their

"20/20" vision for promoting use of the club facilities by giving the WMB a fresh new look. With a new air conditioning system, fresh paint in the ballroom, and refinished hardwood flooring, the WMB was ready to host an exciting year of events. And to complement the WMB's rejuvenation, the board also oversaw the launch of a new website to support a full calendar of events with reservation deposits in the SCC account.

The club also managed to transition MGP back under direct club management after a fifteen year span during which maintenance was provided through Jefferson County Parks and Recreation. Fresh eyes turned to MGP and began to envision a plan for basic maintenance and more. One of the new board members, David Rosen, offered to be the lead in this effort and took on two major tasks: coordinating mowing for the 26-acre park and caring for the park's trees. David worked with a

contractor and the EPIC Soccer Club from Shepherdstown to cultivate beautiful lawns in the park. He also worked with Eric Berndt and his company, Viking Trees LLC, to prune and tend to trees that had been damaged by weather or through natural processes to prevent tree limbs from falling on our walking paths and near the children's playground. Some of the pruned tree limbs were nearly two feet in diameter! Safety cones were arranged and working areas marked as Viking Trees donated their time to the park several days a month. The SCC is very thankful to them and their dedication to preserve the trees!

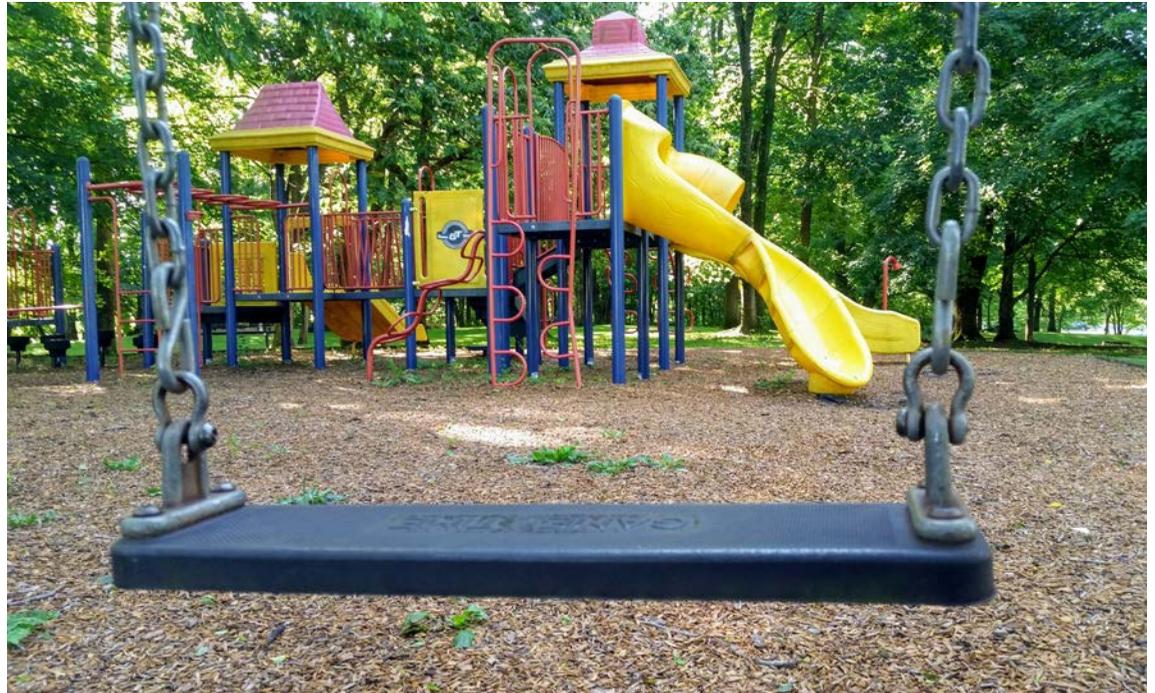
In early February, committees formed for the major spring fundraising event -- the Back Alley Tour and Tea (BATT). A host of Shepherdstown residents had already signed up for the rigorous work required to prepare their gardens "to the 9's" and turn the tour route into a splendid embodiment of spring. The BATT was lining up nicely, and the event pledged to be a delightful experience. But the cold of February, or maybe a chilling tune playing in the distance, was about to strike a discordant tone with this springtime symphony.

The news started to talk about a new kind of flu virus in China. There were predictions of an illness that was twenty times as deadly as the normal flu might be. Most of us didn't really register that in those first few days. Initially, there were outbreaks in other countries. And for many it was merely a remote curiosity. But then cases began to appear in Washington State, in Boston, in New York City. We began to ask ourselves what something twenty times worse than the flu might look like.

In mid-March, as the Governor announced the shelter at home guidelines, the SCC board realized this would be a different Spring. Refunds were the order of the day. Cancelling the BATT followed shortly after. It was clear that the virus was not going away for some time.

Plans changed for the opening of the park, which had been set for April 1st. The Governor mandated that, although parks could be open for walking and physical distance activities, the restrooms, kitchen, and playground could not be adequately sanitized for COVID-19, which could remain contagious for up to three days on untreated surfaces. Closed signs were put up and the playground was enclosed with yellow caution tape.

But it appeared that not all park visitors believed the news reports or the signs, because the caution tape was removed not once, not twice,



“

... Good things are still happening at Morgan's Grove Park ...

”

but three times. The last time, it was cut into foot long pieces that blew in the wind across the park grounds. Discussions with the Mayor and Jefferson County Parks and Recreation led to better signage which appears to be working. Surely, the new big, bright yellow signs are clear: Park Closed – COVID-19. Perhaps the person that cut the original tape realized that the spread of the virus amongst children could pass to adults with predicted results. Please remember, we are truly all in this together so be a good neighbor and help keep our parks safe for all!

And don't worry, good things are still happening at Morgan's Grove Park even during the COVID-19 pandemic! For example, a volunteer, Hardy Mason, is continuing a tradition he began

a few years ago by planting blight resistant Chestnut Trees. While the majestic Ash Trees are often the subject of park habitat discussions, bringing back "the spreading chestnuts" with a blight-resistant variety is something worth talking about. And this project is just one of many. Eagle Scout projects have added new railings at the pavilion, cleaned up the debris that had accumulated in the Quonset storage building and grounds over the years. Others have worked on clearing out invasive plant growth in the stream which helps to ensure the source of water for the Town Run remains clear, cold, and clean.

Would you like to join in the fun? The SCC is a service organization run by volunteers and we are always ready to welcome new members. We are here, ready to embrace your support for Morgan's Grove Park, the War Memorial Building, and our community. Our organization has grown through fundraising and generous donations throughout our 75-year history and if you'd like to support us in that way, this is certainly a time where donations would be more than welcome! Please go to our website (<https://shepherdstowncc.org>) to make a donation, learn more about what we do, become a member, or contact us about all the great things we do!

SUBMITTED BY: Steve Wabnitz

// MAIN STREET

CREATING A NEW SPACE IN THE COMMUNITY

Hamilton's Tavern 1840



Jeremiah and Anthony Brooks are excited to include the creations of Bolivar Bread Bakery in their menu offerings.

CHEF JEREMIAH BROOKS and his partner in business & life, Anthony Brooks, were looking forward to the spring of 2020 when crowds would begin returning to the small restaurant they had opened in historic Harpers Ferry the previous July. With a small dining room and patio, and an even smaller kitchen, Hamilton's Tavern 1840 was an intimate space guaranteed to draw in travelers and locals alike. Feeling confident, Jeremiah and Anthony had also leased the space vacated by Mena's Pizzeria further up the hill, with the thought to serve a more casual menu for locals.

With the pandemic, the easy decision to sign a long-term lease on their small restaurant suddenly looked untenable. And they were

committed to renting the new space as well. With the same inventiveness that they bring to their guests' tables every night, Jeremiah and Anthony decided to jump forward into a completely new plan — recreating the original Tavern in the new space. Opening just last month, the enthusiastic reception from the local community has confirmed their faith that they've made the right choice.

Anthony spoke a bit about what drives the success of the restaurant: "Chef Jeremiah focuses on the food and we create what we call experiential dining. It's also important that we have a food network here in Jefferson County and the surrounding area. We can serve local tastes; it's often a subtle thing, but people who will travel to experience food understand it. It extends beyond the food and wine to the energy the Chef brings to the table for each meal. We have team service and everyone participates to put on what we think of as a show, both on the plate and in the dining room."

But Hamilton's Tavern is not just for visitors. As Anthony describes it, "We view the restaurant as a platform for building the community. One of the fortunate changes from the move is the larger space, both inside and out. Chef Jeremiah appreciates the larger kitchen, and our guests appreciate the porches and patios. The large parking lot behind the restaurant makes it convenient for everyone too."

Anthony mentioned working with Bolivar Bread Bakery down the street — "We focus on

sharing the community with our guests, whether that is bringing locally sourced food and ingredients into our restaurant — or sending a guest down the street for the specific cup of coffee we know they will enjoy."

This engagement of the community was key to reopening in a new space in less than two months. "When you can work with the community, there is an energy that makes everyone stronger. As we realized it didn't make sense to try serving guests in our old space with the pandemic restrictions, we started cooking for our team. And they worked for us to prepare the new space and move all of the interior elements up the hill. We had people in the community who came in and helped us with masonry and other construction with just the promise of a meal. I realized what we meant to the community one morning when I looked out the front door and saw what I thought was a flyer stuck under the doormat. Turns out it was a new mat, with a note from a neighbor who had put it there to thank us for welcoming the community to our restaurant."

Hamilton's Tavern 1840 is located at 914 Washington Street in Harpers Ferry. Visit the website (HamiltonsTavern1840.com) for menus and reservations.

ARTICLE BY: Observer Staff



Andrew Skinner

Stephen Skinner

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// MAIN STREET

STAYING OPEN IN STYLE

Honor D Fine Shoes & Hats

MARCH WAS PLANNED AS A grand opening for a new street-front space on German Street in Shepherdstown. Honor Thomas had orders for spring merchandise being delivered to the freshly-painted shop and plans for an event-filled spring for her regular customers. “When the shut-down restrictions hit I stayed home for a week. I have a daughter who lives in Queens, in New York City, and hearing the stories from there, it seemed frivolous to be thinking about my hats and shoes.” Honor recalled, talking about the first week of the shelter at home restrictions. “It was odd for me, I’ve always been working and selling.”

“But I started to think about other times, when the country was at war, what did people do?” she continued. So at the end of that first week, Honor returned to her shop. As she stood with her back to the quiet storefront, staring at her idle sewing machine, an idea began to take form. A supporter of the Shepherdstown Day Care Center had donated yards of fine batik fabric collected from her travels in Asia. Honor had been working with her to organize a sale of the material as a fundraiser for the school. “These were very nice fabric panels, what you would use for table runners or a blouse.” Now the fundraiser was off, but the day care center still needed donations. Honor was ready with a new plan.

From a small corner in the back of her shop, Honor has been manufacturing masks every day since the end of March. “At first I was using ribbons that I had lying around, because I couldn’t get elastic. I sell them for \$5 and donate all of the



Mask production on German Street.

funds to the day care center. I have customers who come in and ask for custom masks, so I sew them to order and ask them to buy two.”

As soon as the state’s guidelines allowed retail shops to open, Honor unlocked her door.

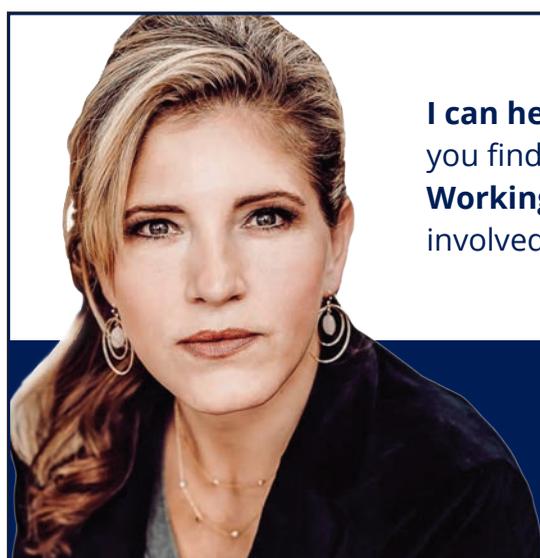
“I’m not seeing a lot of my regulars yet, which I completely understand. But I’m getting enough traffic to get by. Along with masks, I’m making baby hats. I’m lucky with the type of merchandise I sell — it’s seasonal but the styles are always in fashion. If I don’t sell it this spring I can sell it next year.”

During the shut down, Honor also thought about how she could expand beyond the retail store to connect with her customers. “I offered delivery and expanded the website,” she said. “I didn’t see a lot of interest and I realized that my customers come to the shop for the same reason I do — it’s an experience. I started my career in retail sales and it’s always been about the excitement of helping the customer and their appreciation. It’s why I decided to open a shop here.”

When asked about what she sees for the summer and beyond, Honor had a clear response: “We just need to get this year over. I refuse to go out of business. For me, it’s about coming to work every day. And believing one day, it will get better.”

Visit Honor D Fine Shoes & Hats at 121 West German Street in Shepherdstown (call 304-539-3236 for hours and assistance).

ARTICLE BY: Observer Staff



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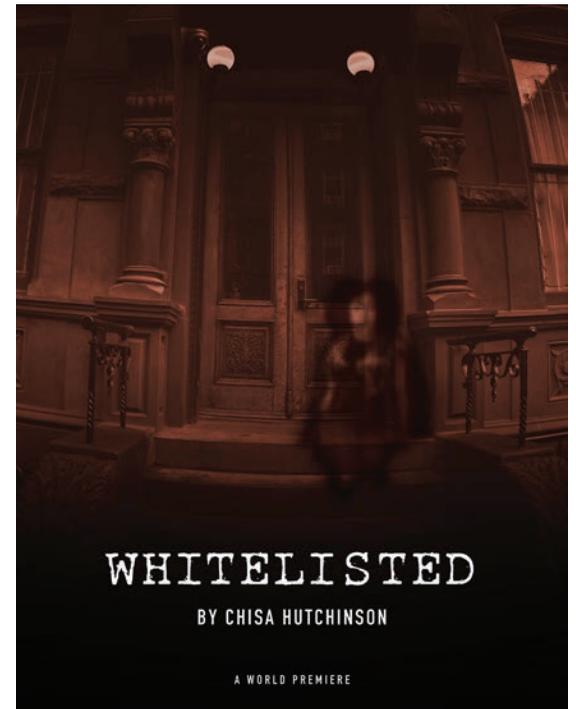
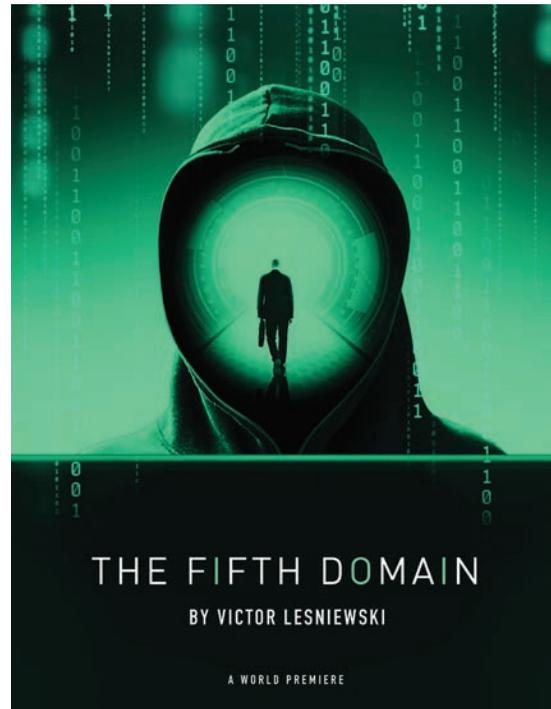
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// CULTURE

A NEW AMERICAN THEATER EXPERIENCE

CATF UnMuted in 2020



IF THE CATF TEAM found themselves lost in the woods, they wouldn't just look for the signs to get back on the old road — they'd figure out how to blaze a new trail. We've all learned a lot over the past four months, enough to know that the Contemporary American Theater Festival made the right decision to postpone the summer season. While the community has been mourning the loss, the team got to work at what they do best — being creative.

The CATF team's ambition is to produce new American theater, to set an expanded stage to engage with writers, actors and patrons, to connect the audience with provocative ideas, and to facilitate conversations about art. The challenge now: how to create art about connectedness without being in the same room as the audience.

Even before the pandemic, the team was thinking about changes to the lectures and discussions of its *TalkTheater* programming. These glimpses behind the scenes have evolved into their own stream of programming alongside the plays. The inspiration: what if *Talk Theater* could be the new programming for the pandemic world?

CATF has always been different, more of a process than just a production. If you've attended past seasons, you've seen plays evolve night to night. By design, the season is short, just long enough to birth each new play and set it loose upon the world. Even though there will be no stage productions this year, CATF has decided to proceed with script development. The 6 writers and 3 directors were kept on contract and given the seeming luxury of a longer time frame in which to develop each play.

To maintain the same focused energy without the intense in-person interaction of writers, directors and actors leading up to opening weekend, Production Manager Trent Kugler created a remote stage kit for the actors (think green screen and sound stage in a box) to bring the teams together in a connected creative space. Not so much a virtual stage as an extended stage.

Each show will be limited to 500 audience members, with one premier and one encore performance. The basic format will open with live discussion, followed by a presentation of recorded material performed on remote stages, and end with another live discussion session. During the

performance the audience will be able to interact with interns and staff online and by phone. To preserve the essential spirit of the live festival and highlight the importance of experiencing the performances in the moment, there will be no recordings available for general viewing after the events.

ARTICLE BY: Observer Staff

CATF UnMuted is scheduled for a limited run to present all 6 *TalkTheater* events over 3 Saturdays -- July 11, 18 and 25, with two events each day. Guests should confirm the final schedules at the CATF website (CATF.org). Pre-register for tickets online, call the box office at 304-876-3473, or email info@CATF.org.

// BOOK REVIEW

POISONED LAND

Lady Chevy, by John Woods
(Pegasus Books, 2020)

THE COVER OF John Woods' debut novel *Lady Chevy* portrays a mountain landscape against an orange-hued backdrop. The colors may depict an oddly-tinted sunset or, more likely, the fiery, sulfurous sky of a land ravaged by the fracking industry, where flares emerging from giant towers light the horizon and tainted aquifers, flammable tap water, and earthquakes have become a normal occurrence.

The shadow of one such fracking rig looms over high school senior Amy Wirkner both figuratively and literally. Her father sold the mineral rights of their property to an energy company that pays them \$900 a month to extract natural gas. The deal proved to be a costly devil's bargain for the Wirkners as their newborn son, Stonewall, is afflicted by malformations and neurological problems.

Amy, cruelly nicknamed Chevy by her classmates due to her "wide backside," seeks to escape the small town of Barnesville, Ohio and become a veterinarian. Like so many formerly industrial towns in Appalachia, the past shapes the way in which Barnesville's residents, old and young, see themselves. To Amy, the town's abandoned factories "prove things truly were much better. It isn't our imagination. The world wasn't always this way. Once, we contributed. We were important. We mattered. All talk now of our value is in the past tense, reminding us we are no longer great."

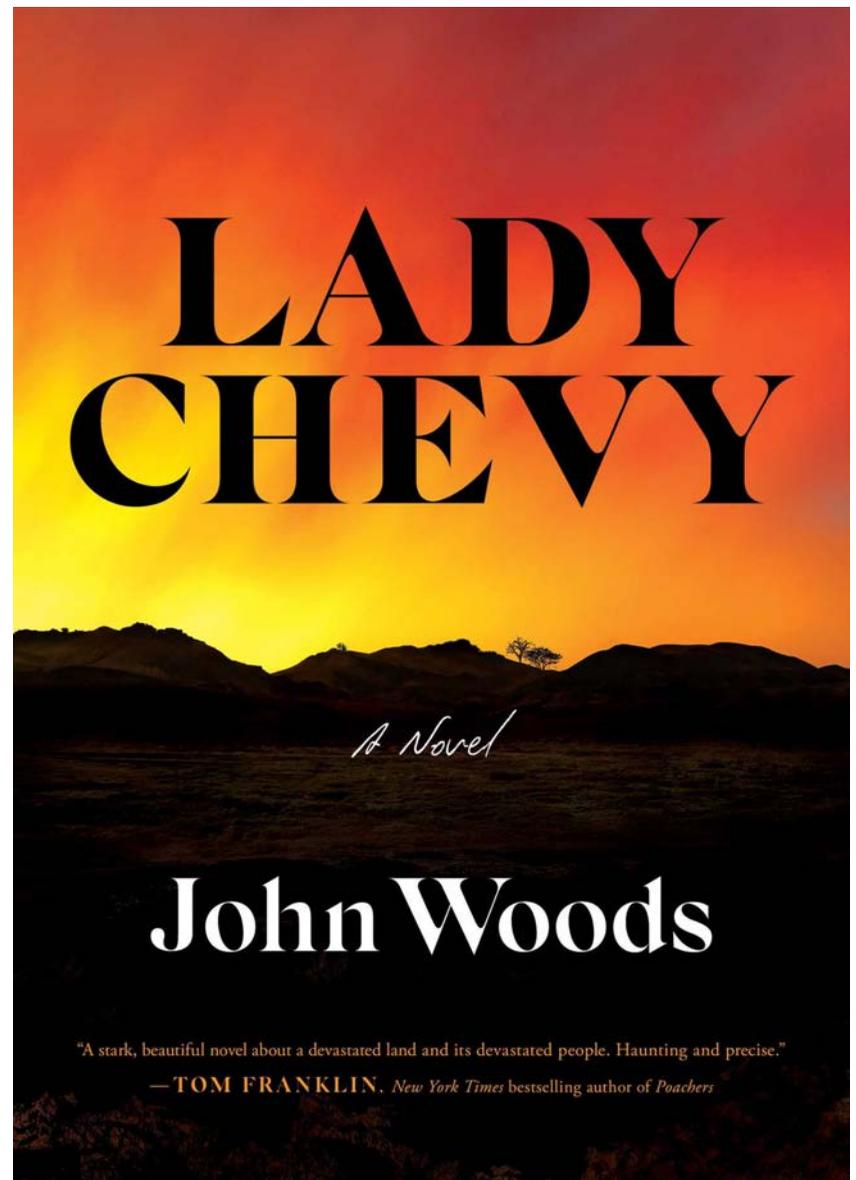
Moving away would entail leaving behind not just Barnesville's economic devastation but Amy's own dysfunctional family. Her parent's marriage is marred by her father's alcoholism and her mother's infidelities, and her uncle Thomas, the one relative who seems invested in helping Amy go to college, is a neo-Nazi survivalist.

Woods' talent as a writer is highlighted in the nuanced depiction of these unsavory characters, aptly capturing the mindset that originates their worldview. Besides Amy's uncle, we also read about her grandfather Barton Shoemaker, a former Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, and local police officer Brett Hastings, a sociopathic enforcer inspired by Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and social Darwinist obsessions. These three-dimensional renditions of antisocial individuals also condition the reader's experience, making *Lady Chevy* both relentlessly bleak and compulsively readable.

Grounded in authenticity and evocative prose, the novel is nevertheless propelled by a suspenseful plot that kicks into gear when Amy's best friend, Paul McCormick, pays her a late night visit. Drunk and enraged by his father's black lung disease, Paul wants to destroy a chemical tank owned by Demont, the energy company that is ravaging Barnesville. He has built three pipe bombs based off *The Anarchist Cookbook* and he needs Amy to be his getaway driver. The ill-conceived plan has disastrous consequences.

A SELF-ASSURED DEBUT

Woods, who grew up in Appalachian Ohio, has published several short stories set in the same region and fictional universe of *Lady Chevy*. While one does not need to read them to fully appreciate the story, they



likely help explain why this self-assured novel can be appreciated as a noir thriller and an artful literary exploration of social issues. Woods does not limit himself to the naturalistic description of a distressed region and its inhabitants nor does he editorialize. Instead, he delves into the psyche of outsiders, political radicals, teenagers forced into adulthood, and destitute adults with an eye for the precise detail and acute observation that stirs the reader's imagination and invites them to think.

An Appalachian Bildungsroman, a moral depiction of amoral characters in a hardscrabble world, and an all-around compelling story, *Lady Chevy* is an outstanding literary debut.

ARTICLE BY: Gonzalo Baeza

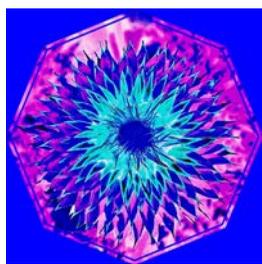
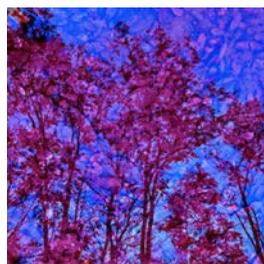
Gonzalo is a writer born in Texas, raised in Chile, and currently living in Shepherdstown. His books have been published in Spain and Chile, and his fiction has appeared in Boulevard, Goliad, and The Texas Review, among others.

// ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

GIL NARRO GARCIA

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Clockwise from top left: After The Wind Storm, Gardenia, Spring Calypso, Tree Peony, Field Thistle, Spring Reflections, Spring Missiles (center)



SEQUESTRATION SERIES / 2020

With the onset of the pandemic, artist Gil Narro Garcia has been creating a collection of images he terms “Ice Disk” and “Flora” — digital photos from his walks that he then transforms to enhance the chromatic mysteries of nature.

ALTHOUGH GIL NARRO GARCIA may be best known for his nature-inspired dinner plates, his fascination with the natural world is reflected in all of his work. Garcia was introduced to the creative opportunities present in nature as a child growing up in a family full of gardeners and landscapers. He has since developed his own style of “landscaping” in which he reworks found items from nature into quirky, delightful sculptures. He starts with feathers, nests, branches, mushrooms,



and vines and then embellishes these elements with acrylic paints, beads, copper wire, and other materials to create whimsical compositions.

A common thread weaving through all of Garcia’s work is that seasons come and go and nature is constantly remaking itself in unexpected ways. In times such as these, his work encourages all of us to pause and consider our own place in this cycle. Perhaps one inspiration is how change and upheaval often give rise to the most intriguing opportunities.

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// LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CANDIDATES SPEAK

Shepherdstown Town Election - Tuesday, July 21

The Mayor is the chief executive officer of the Corporation of Shepherdstown, overseeing a staff of approximately 30 in the administrative, police, and public works departments. The Mayor is responsible for faithfully executing the orders, by-laws, ordinances, acts, and resolutions of the Town Council. The Charter also assigns the Mayor the duty to ensure that the peace and good order of the Town are maintained. The role is a volunteer position with a small stipend.

The Observer asked all candidates to respond to a series of questions about their experience and priorities. These responses are edited only for brevity:



JIM AUXER
Candidate for Mayor

Jim Auxer is a proud graduate of Shepherd University, who returned to Shepherdstown in 1999 after a 25 year career as a corrections officer in Pennsylvania. He immediately stepped up to serve on the Town Water Board and figured he would spend many more years volunteering in the community. Within a year he had been elected Mayor. "I never considered myself to be a politician, but the citizens saw the town needed work and I guess they figured I was willing to do it. The first year I remember we had to collect money out of the parking meters each week to make payroll. It's important when you are in local government to remember that the unexpected is always a possibility. I'm very proud that we've managed the town's finances so that in the current emergency we haven't needed to even think about reducing services or staff reductions."

"When you think about Shepherdstown, it's not a big place. But it has the same types of problems and issues as any other town. Officially, this is only a part time job, but I attend maybe 25 meetings every month, and now there are even more. As Mayor, I manage a lot of meetings. From my professional training, I've learned that it's important to be civil even if you have disagreements. Above all, you have to listen. Sometimes that means you need to balance the discussions to let everyone have a turn. But I do believe that the best outcomes come from letting everyone have a say. You have to represent everybody in the community and you can't have a personal agenda."

"But the job is not just about attending meetings, it's about being the face of the town. Realistically, there is never a time when you are not the Mayor. I have an open door policy, so when someone wants to come in and talk, they can. Or they will stop me in the street, or even knock on my door at home. You need to be ready to do the work and help solve the problems when they come to you. We don't have a big staff, and I really try to help people fix problems expeditiously."

"When you care about Shepherdstown as much as I do (and I really do care about the town), you also realize that the tone of the town is important, what makes it special. A lot of it is how we respect one another, how

we put our best foot forward for visitors, how that makes our town an attractive place to live and to visit. It's important to me to go out and talk to people, to hear them in person, to really understand what they feel."

"A big part of Shepherdstown is our history, and I spend a lot of time thinking about how we preserve that — the people, the memories. But a lot of what the Mayor does is to anticipate problems and work with the county and state government over years and years to come up with creative solutions. For example, the Shepherdstown Path project to Morgan's Grove Park that was just announced took 5 years; getting the state to install the new lights on the bridge took 5 years. You have to be willing to negotiate until you get what's right for the town, even if it takes a while."

"I also spend a lot of time working with the University. It's a very symbiotic relationship and I focus a lot on how we can help each other. That's how we got the parking lot — it wasn't in the University's plan or budget, but we were able to leverage a small investment from the Town into something that's a huge benefit for both the community and the University."

"At the end of the day, it's about doing the work. And I don't see any job as too small for the Mayor."



TODD COTGREAVE
Candidate for Mayor

A graduate of Shepherd University, Todd Cotgreave calls Shepherdstown home. Asked about why he decided to settle here, he remarked with enthusiasm "This August will mark the 28th year I have lived in Shepherdstown. I remember what it was in 1992 that endeared this town to me. It was the people. Every day I was in town I was greeted by people who were smiling and saying hello and taking part in a multitude of parades that had more dogs than people. The experiences I've had in Shepherdstown have made me who I am. Win, lose,

or draw, I will always be an advocate for the people in Shepherdstown."

Talking about the challenges and priorities for Shepherdstown over the next couple of years, Todd continued "the Town will need to focus on tourism as we proceed into the future. Our once thriving downtown has seen a slow decline over the past decade and we need to see changes made in parking, advertising, and attitude in general. We are a town full of artisans, farmers and thinkers. We need to make decisions that will focus on the people and businesses that make Shepherdstown special."

Asked about the experience and perspectives he would bring to the table if elected to serve as Mayor, Todd responded "I have found that over the years I have really enjoyed serving the community. We're a wonderful group of people that energetically take care of each other. With every bit of foundation that I have created in the past, it's the community itself that realized its potential and used it for uses beyond my imagination. So my thought is that if I were able to serve as Mayor, I could bring more structure and foundation for the community to build upon."

When asked about how he would educate himself on the issues facing the community and balance the differences of opinions on issues that come before the council, Todd said "the only way to have an idea on issues in town is to be actively engaged in community events and walking around town talking with people. You have to know everyone to know what is going on. When trying to balance differences of opinion you have to remember that we are all in this together. Even if we don't like the outcome it's up to us to make sure that we are still compassionate and understanding. It's easy to take sides and divide; it is much harder to realize that people with differences will one day need each other again. We are in a small town, we have to depend on each other whether we agree on everything or not."

Talking about Covid-19, Cotgreave says "it's a game changer for sure. One thing that needs to change is the communication and actions from Town Hall to residents in the area. What the Town needs to do is act as a funnel to find people with issues, learn what their specific struggles are and point them to where help can be found. The Mayor's office can, at a minimum, issue weekly statements relating to the effects of Covid-19 and create a safe space for those who want to help."

Cotgreave also commented on how Shepherdstown can lead on racial justice. "We can serve as an example by bringing questions created during recent events to light and acting on them. What has racial disparity looked like in the past and how is it affecting us now? Are many residents having a hard time due to ever-increasing rents and costs of living? Have we been slowly gentrifying our town so only retirees and commuters can afford to live here? How do our police interact with residents?"

"Have we been immune to racial disparity? No, we haven't. We are blessed that we live in a loving and helpful community, but is that the best we can do? I don't think so. I think we can and should do more."

// LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CANDIDATES SPEAK

Shepherdstown Town Election - Tuesday, July 21

The Town Council has authority, as delegated by the State of WV, to maintain and control the public roads, regulate businesses, control the building of houses and structures, to authorize the provision of public utilities and to maintain the general peace and order. The Council consists of 5 at-large members elected for a term of 2 years, along with the Town Recorder and the Mayor. The role is a volunteer position.

The Observer asked all candidates to respond to a series of questions about their experience and priorities. These responses are edited only for brevity:



CORINNE AIRGOOD
Candidate for Council

Corinne Airgood moved to town in 2016 to attend Shepherd University. As she describes it, "I fell in love with the town due to its small town charm, yet being in such proximity to great resources like DC and Baltimore. In 2018 I started my own pet sitting business and that's when it really started to feel like home. I was meeting more people, learning more about the town, working for the Visitor Center, and starting to feel like a local."

Corinne continued "As a younger voice I can bring an entirely different perspective to the town. Shepherd University campus is within town limits, yet so many students that I have spoken with don't know anything about the town and that needs to change. There are so many opportunities to partner with the University."

Thinking about the challenges ahead, Airgood focused on "the need to make Shepherdstown a safe place for everyone so that our tourism industry isn't affected too severely, and neither are our residents."

Talking about how the Town works, Airgood feels "It can be improved in every single way. The reason I decided to run for Council is because in the past year I would constantly reach out to a former Council member to ask questions from 'how do I get the garbage guys to pick up a screen door?' to 'how was the app that is used for parking determined?'"

"I want to work on improving the Town website – making it more user friendly and easier to navigate; making the town government more transparent – making the budget available to the public, making sure all meeting minutes are published, improving communication between the town and its residents, including a FAQ page and question submission area on the website, and live-streaming all public meetings."

Speaking about her priorities, Airgood mentioned working with the business community and building upon the town's welcoming spirit. "Shepherdstown is already considered a place that is welcoming and safe to LGBT+ community. It wouldn't be difficult to make a visual set of displays to show the community of color that they will be treated with respect and dignity. I would also like to create a safe place to take complaints and/or comments of disparities in the community regarding race, sex, gender, sexuality, etc."



JIM FORD
Candidate for Council

Jim Ford has lived in Shepherdstown for 18 years; he and his wife ran a local hospitality business in town for 12 years. Jim has previously served 6 terms on Town Council and has been a member of the Water Board since 2012.

Asked about the challenges ahead, Jim responded, "I believe economic viability is always an issue for Shepherdstown, as it is for any small town in West Virginia. That issue presents itself both as a challenge to the Town to pay its bills and a challenge for all the businesses on German Street to remain open. In addition to the normal pressures that we feel in those areas, this year will be more severe due to the Covid-19-related drop in tourism, which I expect to be extreme."

When asked why run again for Council, Jim said "I view being a member of Town Council as a service to the community. In the past there have been elections in which we did not have enough candidates to fill the 5 Council seats. When I found out that many Council members were retiring I decided to run simply so we would have a full slate of candidates." When asked about how he would educate himself on the issues facing the community and balance the differences of opinions on issues that come before the council, Jim replied with a very straightforward answer: "Listen, listen some more, then keep listening."

In dealing with Covid-19, Jim stressed, "We will need to ensure that we stay aware of the advice and directives being given by the State and County health departments with respect to how we respond to the Covid-19 challenge. I expect that it will require a lot of vigilance well into the fall and some significant awareness into next year."

Speaking about the priorities for the next Council term, Jim stated "the issue that the Town Council has the most responsibility for is justice. I believe the performance of our police force in recent years has been exemplary. I, for one, am quite thankful for that because we have had examples of less than stellar police performance in the previous decade. However, it remains the responsibility of the Mayor and Town Council to ensure the continued excellence of the police force."



MARTY AMERIKANER

Candidate for Council

Marty Amerikaner and his wife Linda relocated to Shepherdstown 5 years ago, after many years in Huntington working at Marshall. With obvious enthusiasm, he relates "we've been so impressed with this extraordinary, welcoming community as we developed close friendships and become involved in many of the organizations and activities that delightfully saturate our town! I've always been a strong believer in actively contributing to one's community as evidenced by the range of volunteering I've done since moving here, including teaching in the Life Long Learning program, and working with "Age Friendly Shepherdstown," Shepherdstown Area Independent Living (SAIL), community groups supporting Shepherdstown Film Society, and the SPEAK Story Series, and serving on the Board of Shenandoah Community Health Clinic."

"I am running for Council because I genuinely enjoy working with colleagues on important issues. My professional work in psychology included varied leadership roles - chairing the Psychology Department at Marshall University, chairing the WV Board of Psychological Examiners, and President of the WV Psychological Association. I hope my experience and skills will contribute to the Council's work. Also, it turns out that I'm one of those weird people who actually enjoys sitting in meetings to work on strategic problem solving."

Marty points out that "Shepherdstown is a vibrant place to live and visit, yet like most small towns, our resources are limited. Prioritizing issues based on careful assessment of constituents' concerns and targeting budget allocations towards sustained efforts to resolve them ought to be central to Council's work. As a member of the "Age Friendly Shepherdstown" steering committee (an AARP- affiliated group) I was involved in a project to assess community members' concerns. "Listening sessions" with community groups, and an on-line survey completed by over 350 community residents revealed three key needs: improved access to public transportation, improved alleys, sidewalks and bike/pedestrian paths, and improved access to information about town-related events and resources. Following up on these results, I worked with Age Friendly Shepherdstown, along with Town Council and SAIL, to apply for an AARP Community Challenge grant that will begin to address these issues."

Amerikaner noted that "public acknowledgement of systemic disparities is overdue, as is the need for sustained evidence-based attempts to address them at the local, as well as national levels."

JENNY HAYNES

Candidate for Council

Jenny Haynes, long-time resident of Shepherdstown, emphasizes that “working together and effectively is big for me, it’s important that everyone feels included in the future of this town. I think the key issue on everyone’s mind is (and will be) the ongoing challenges of this pandemic and to keep Shepherdstown financially strong. The current Council members and Mayor have been working with community members, business leaders, and organizations to keep Shepherdstown informed and to adapt to this current environment.”

Haynes stresses, “While I don’t really have political motives or ambitions, I do have Shepherdstown in my best interests. I want to use my ability to engage in local resources to bring people together and continue to work with our local organizations to tackle issues in town. I am invested in the future of this town and will always do my best. I will show up and put in the work.”

Haynes recalls that she has always been an eager volunteer, “I have always done what I could, I show up to volunteer whether it be installing 1,000 bulbs, cleaning up parks, or helping out with any event in town. I have been involved with The Shepherdstown Community Club for about twelve years. A few years ago I was asked to take care of rentals for SCC and The War Memorial Building, and now I’m the vice president! I also am responsible for the care and rentals at The Station of Shepherdstown and I’m on the board of the Visitors Center. I chair Christmas in Shepherdstown and regularly run the Haunted Hallway & Vampire’s Ball at BooFest. I am currently a member of the Town’s Parks & Recreation Commission. I guess I am a little bit everywhere. Shepherdstown is important to me and I think that it is a great responsibility to keep Shepherdstown safe, lively, and a community-driven place for everyone.”



CHERYL ROBERTS

Candidate for Council

Cheryl Roberts was raised in Shepherdstown, graduated from Shepherd University and earned a Master’s degree from the University of the District of Columbia. Currently serving on the Town Council, Roberts has worked at the Department of Veterans Affairs for 36 years, serves as Witness Ministry leader at Asbury United Methodist Church, is an Active Life Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., is the newly-elected President of the Shepherdstown Lions Club, sits on the Board of the Shepherd University Athletic Club, and is a Life Member of the NAACP.

Asked about the challenges ahead, Roberts prioritizes two broad issues: “First, ensuring all town residents are informed, treated fairly, and feel included, particularly those west of Duke and east of Princess Streets. Many people picture Shepherdstown as German Street between Duke and Princess Streets. Our town is diverse and a community in which I am proud to serve and will continue to do my best to represent. Second, during this pandemic, my focus is on continuing to assure the safety and healthiness of our residents, physically, emotionally, and most of all, mentally. As the

Chairperson of the Town Parks & Recreation committee for many years, I will focus on ensuring the parks are maintained in the same manner in preparation for everything returning to our idea of “normal.”

Cheryl looks to her experience serving on Council for the past four years to understand the importance of “inclusiveness with communication and services, maintaining a safe and healthy environment for residents and visitors.” She also emphasizes the need for “continuing to support local businesses, socially, economically, and physically. I am looking forward to businesses being re-opened, residents returning to being gainfully employed, visitors returning to boost our economy, as well as Shepherd University resuming classes and continuing with the tradition in which we are accustomed.”

Roberts comments “my motivation to continue to serve is attributed to the experience which I have gained in local government, the joy of being involved with decisions which affect the residence of Shepherdstown, and my passion for the history of the town, lifelong relationships, and the true sense of belonging, having a voice, and contributing to the decisions affecting the current and future of Shepherdstown.”



CHRIS STROECH

Candidate for Council

A graduate of WVU (both undergrad and law school), Chris Stroech grew up here and attended Shepherdstown Jr. High and Jefferson High Schools. Currently an attorney with Arnold & Bailey in Charles Town, Chris has a long history of volunteering his time to support the town, including service on the Tree Commission, Planning Commission, and the Recycling Task Force. He led the effort to amend the town ordinances to prohibit discrimination based upon sexual orientation.

Having participated as a citizen in various town committees, Chris feels he is well prepared to help shape the discussions and help lead the subcommittee activities that come before the council. “As a Council member, you need to identify the issues to delegate to subcommittees and task forces, and to also set parameters and clear expectations to those working groups that will enable them to report back to the Council with informed and actionable recommendations. The Council’s role is to listen to all sides of an issue and to ensure that members have the information to make informed and timely decisions.”

Chris feels strongly that the informal role a Council member can perform to engage with the town residents and businesses is just as important as the formal responsibilities: “To be effective, Council members should expect to do more than go to meetings and vote. We need to lead on facilitating communication and discussion, to invite participation, and to be creative in outreach to the community.” He points to the process that led to the “Shepherdstown Sustainable Act” ordinance as an example of engaging residents and businesses to build a consensus on a complex issue. Chris strongly believes that livestream video and recordings of Council meetings is an important component of this engagement process.

As a resident, Chris sees Shepherdstown as a progressive community that is willing to lead on important issues. “Maintaining this vitality, supporting our local business community, and connecting with other towns and the surrounding community is even more important over the next several years as we navigate the post-Covid-19 reconstruction era.”

Chris welcomes voters to email him at StroechForShepherdstown@gmail.com or to message him on Facebook @StroechforShepherdstown.



DEB TUCKER

Candidate for Council

Deb Tucker moved to Shepherdstown in 2011 and bought the Stone Soup Bistro (now Bistro 112) on German Street. She notes, “I have been actively involved in the community since I moved here. I founded BEST (Better Experiences for Shepherdstown Tourists) that created new festivals such as DogFest, BooFest and GardenFest. I’ve sat on the board of Shepherdstown Visitors Center (SVC) and was the chair of its Marketing Committee that created the shepherdstown.info website. In addition to the Town Council, I’ve served on the Planning Commission and the AirBnB Task Force.”

Deb is running to serve a third term on the Council, stressing “While I bring a business perspective to the Council, I try to represent all constituents and to balance the historic significance of the town and the habits of its current occupants. I am concerned about maintaining a vibrant downtown, particularly in light of the current lock-down. The Council needs to address economic development, the current social change taking place and implement critical aspects of its Long-Term Strategic Plan.”

Tucker emphasizes that the Council should take on more responsibility and be involved change-agents, outlining four specific priorities to move beyond the status quo: “First, to change the Town decision-making process. I think we need to establish committee budgets, written processes & procedures and have better communications of the decision-making process of town governance. Second, to address the Town’s changing fiscal situation. Other Home Rule opportunities such as the sales tax, the demise of gaming funds, meter-revenues, cost of maintaining a police force & utility services, and additional annexation all need to be factored into a long term financial plan for the Town. Third, address the health of our downtown businesses. Even before the pandemic, our businesses were struggling. The move to online shopping, a tourism-based economy, absentee landlords, non-student focused businesses, all leads to the Town needing to get involved. Finally, and fundamentally, our municipality needs to address how we engage all members of our community in a meaningful manner. What is the perception of a police force in bullet proof vests and darkened SUV windows? I don’t have answers, but I know we need to initiate a conversation as we all grapple with how we can individually and collectively effect change.”

// COMMUNITY

THE HOPE & CHALLENGES OF A FOOD PANTRY

Jefferson County
Community Ministries

IN A PRE-COVID-19 WORLD, Jefferson County Community Ministries (JCCM) focused on providing emergency assistance with food, clothing and shelter. Started in 1982 as an informal agreement between 6 churches in Charles Town, JCCM has since grown to include participation from nearly 50 churches in the area. The large number of volunteers allows JCCM to offer a broad array of services under their umbrella. The Clothing Closet in Charles Town is the organization's most visible outreach, but JCCM also provides skills coaching, homeless services and some direct financial services.

One of JCCM's longest-running programs is its Food Pantry. The Food Pantry invites broad participation from JCCM members, as well as local businesses who make frequent donations and other community groups that organize food drives and funding events. Although providing emergency food assistance has always been part of JCCM's core mission, making sure people are fed has become a top priority for the organization during the pandemic. With the current sustained downturn, the organization has increased the amount of food they provide for a typical client by 25 percent to meet the increased needs they are seeing. This increased demand is not from an occasional or end of month shortfall, but rather a week-after-week need from the same individuals and families. JCCM's ability to meet this increased level of demand up to now is largely thanks to the continued generosity of the community.

At the same time, the pandemic has introduced new challenges for programs like the Food Pantry. One complication is how to actually get food to those in need. Qualified clients used to walk through the JCCM Food Pantry on West Washington Street in Charles Town to make their own selections. Now, they are met with



Volunteers pick and pack groceries while clients wait outside the Food Pantry in downtown Charles Town.

an intake system. A volunteer does the 'shopping' for them while they wait outside.

Obtaining enough food to keep up with client demand is another struggle. As grocery stores impose limits on individual purchases, donors no longer have the option to add extra food to their carts each week. JCCM has turned to buying some items in bulk, but that strategy still has limitations. Assistant Director, Greg Petersen explains, "Normal donations of hot dogs and hamburgers are down. I could order 60 pounds of hamburger, but I can't break that down to one pound packages for people."

Many of JCCM's clients also struggle just to get to Community Ministries during the pandemic. "We are discovering new clients who can't get out of their homes or people who normally have a ride, no longer do because of the COVID risk."

Petersen oversees the internal operations of the Ministry and is one of 4 staff in the office. He is confident in the organization's volunteers and says they are great at solving problems before he is even aware of them. "Some have been with us for 20 years and don't need overseeing." But the shutdown cut down the volume of volunteers available to the ministry. Almost 90 percent of

volunteers dropped out when the governor made his first stay-at-home directive in March. The most experienced volunteers are typically older which puts them in a high-risk group for the virus. Still, JCCM is adjusting to having newer and fewer helpers on hand. Petersen himself has started filling in by driving food to clients who can't get out. "We focus on client issues not our issues."

Petersen sees JCCM's needs compounding as the pandemic response draws out into months. "We don't think the storm has fully hit yet." He says many needs are only temporarily addressed by the federal stimulus checks and the state rulings that prevent penalties for not paying utilities and rent. He explains, "While those bills are suspended people can use that money for food. People have lost their jobs and people who normally can pay their bills... we may see a new influx once those bills start up again."

For now JCCM is focusing on expanding its volunteer base and encouraging giving opportunities, such as GivingTuesdayNow. Information about how to help with both is available on the JCCM website (jccm.us).

ARTICLE BY: Amy Hiett

// LOCAL FOOD

PROTECTED FARMLAND EXPANDING



The Ware family continues a farming tradition.

JEFFERSON COUNTY'S FARMLAND surrounds us, but unless you're flying overhead it's hard to get a sense of just how much of the County is still used for agricultural production. According to the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board, almost 50 percent of County land is classified as farmland. Elizabeth Wheeler, director of the Farmland Protection Board, says "that represents a critical mass to maintain the infrastructure for our farmers. Meaning the suppliers, the equipment dealers, the depots, the buyers — the network of activity that makes it possible to farm locally."

Six years ago, the Farmland Protection Board set a long-term goal of obtaining conservation easements on 20,000 acres — representing roughly one-third of the total farmland in Jefferson County. Conservation easements are authorized by a program established by West Virginia law in 2000.

These conservation easements qualify farmers to be compensated for the development value of their property while keeping their land as a working farm. Funds for the program are provided by a real estate transfer tax applied to land developers. Each easement is a recorded deed, so it runs with the land in perpetuity, preserving the farmland for future generations.

In June 2020, the Protection Board announced the addition of 748 acres to the program, bringing the total land in the program to 5,455 acres — over 25% of their goal. Three local families, the Magahas, Wares, and McKees, contributed to this recent milestone. The 190-acre Magaha family farm, which produces hay, grain and cattle, sits on land contested during the Battle of Summit Point in the Charles Town district. Nearby, the Ware family produces grain and hay on 280 acres. As owner Rick Ware notes, "Our parents would have been so happy to know that the farm they passed on to us will not be developed." In the Shepherdstown district, the McKee family pastures horses & cows and produces hay on the 278-acre Borden farm. This farm sits within the core area of the Battle of Shepherdstown, the final engagement of the Battle of Antietam.

"The minimum size farm we look for is 20 acres and we have more interest than we have funding, so it can take several years for a family to get their farm into the program," said Wheeler. She also noted also that the program's benefits extend far beyond the acreage in the program. "Protecting our county's farmland goes hand in hand with protecting the quality of life in Jefferson County. Local farms provide us with healthy food, support a diverse economy, and protect water supplies, wildlife habitat and the scenic and historical landscapes that make Jefferson County such a beautiful place to live and visit."



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