

DECEMBER - JANUARY  
2015

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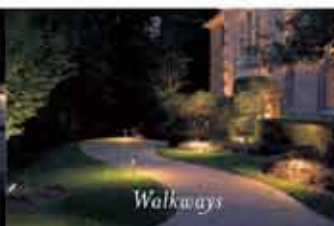
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Volume 6, Issue 1 · December - January 2015

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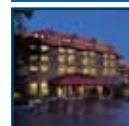
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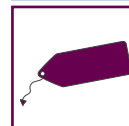
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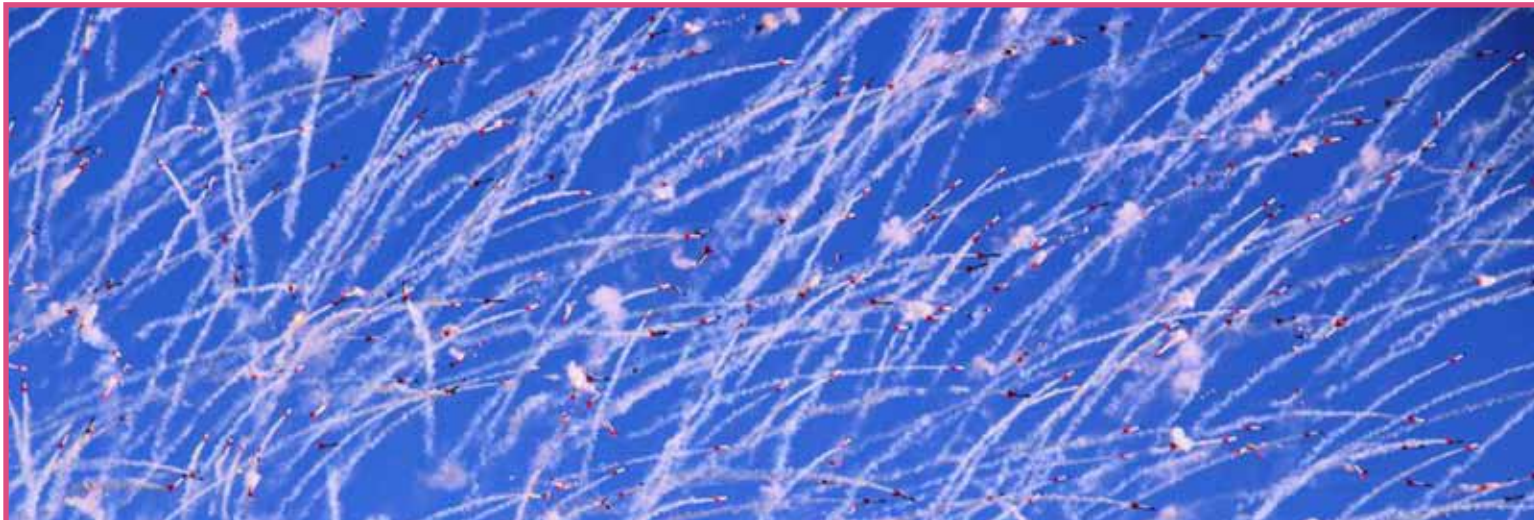


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# More Than A bang!



Rocket4theCure founders, Dylan Whitesel and Sanzio Angeli, featured in our last issue set out to break a world record and simultaneously raise \$20,000 to battle Breast Cancer. On October 26, 2014 at Chesterfield County Fairgrounds, the last pre-launch donation came in as the Rocket4theCure team began their final count-down. When the crowd of over 500 family, friends, and neighbors ended the countdown, rockets emblazoned with the names of both victims and survivors of Breast

Cancer, roared into the sky.

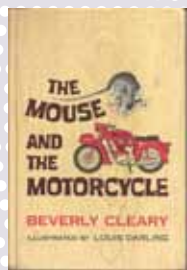
At that moment, a world record was broken - 3,973 rockets launched (previous record was 3,130). **The team raised \$20,155.40 for the Central VA Affiliate of Susan G. Komen.** A seemingly impossible project became possible, and we got just a little bit closer to finding a cure.

***Congratulations Dylan and Sanzio! ■***





# ROBIOUS COMMUNITY



**Robious Elementary School** wrapped up the “*One School, One Book*” Program on November 7th - PTA members Janet Stevens, Adriane Grant and Mel Brewer worked with Literacy Specialist Sherrill Kauffman to get all students reading Beverly Cleary’s “*The Mouse and the Motorcycle*.” The program kicked off in style as the Chesterfield Police escorted Dr. Joel Schmidt and Stacey Austin aboard Dr. Schmidt’s motorcycle to announce the reading program. Bus drivers, custodians, office personnel and other school staff members also received a copy of the book so they too could support students in their literacy development and build excitement. Daily trivia questions were asked, and prizes were awarded.

Both the **James River Regiment** and **Midlothian Marching Trojans** recently earned high ratings from the Virginia Band and Orchestra Directors Association (VBODA). James River High School’s Regiment, directed by Justin Turpin, was awarded the rating of Excellent. Midlothian’s Marching Trojans, directed by Gordon Rawls, was awarded a rating of Superior. The Superior rating earned by the Marching Trojans is the highest possible rating given by the VBODA. *Congratulations!*



**Trinity Episcopal School** shocked number 1 seed and undefeated St. Anne’s-Belfield 20-10 in the VISAA Division II championship game.

The win gives Trinity Episcopal its first ever VISAA state title. Trinity capitalized on Saint’s miscues and jumped to an early lead. Rimoni Dorsey intercepted two St. Anne’s-Belfield pass attempts. John Schotta and Trevion Armstrong also picked off the St. Anne’s-Belfield’s QB in a game that saw the Titans force turnovers in each of the Saints first four possessions. Titan’s QB Blake Bowen led the offense on long, time consuming drives and Trinity’s Jack Freudenthal scored three times capping off Trinity Episcopal’s Championship 2014 season.

**James River Girls Varsity Volleyball Team** beat Cosby in 3 sets to win the 6A South Conference 3 Title. Having lost to Cosby twice this season, this was a HUGE WIN for JRHS! *Congratulations Girls!*



Congratulations to **Midlothian High School Boys & Girls Cross Country Teams: 4A Conference Champions!**



**Midlothian Middle School “Mustangs 5K” Race, October 4, 2014.**

Great turn out, great race, and what a beautiful day. Robious Corridor Magazine was very happy to once again be the title sponsor! Thanks to all of the volunteers and teachers who put on another great race, and the many students, parents, and community athletes who participated.

**Benedictine** defeated Bishop Ireton 23-7 to win the VISAA Division I title. The win did not come as easy as the score may indicate. The Cadets only held a 10-7 lead in the fourth quarter until Benedictine senior David Pilot intercepted a pass and returned it 30-yards for a touchdown to give the Cadets a 17-7 lead with 8:56 to go. Moments later, Cadet Mikey McDonald forced a fumble that Graham Flinn returned to the Bishop Ireton 7-yard line leading to a Scott Bracey score from 1-yard out to extend the lead to 23-7 after the extra point. When the final whistle blew, the Cadets had won the 2014 Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association Division I title.



# John Sawyer

## Robious Corridor's 2014 PERSON OF THE YEAR

There is a theory that the entirety of history is essentially the biography of Great Men, the story of how a select powerful few defined the destiny of the many. And while on some grand scale there is truth to that, most of us don't live our day-to-day lives as though our existence is determined solely by the actions of the world's leaders. Instead we plod along, building our own personal histories, crafting our own story to be passed down through coming generations. The rarest of all though is the person who exists in both planes, that tells an individual tale while touching the lives of numerous people around him. In many ways, those are truly the people who shape history because those are the people we meet and remember as having been real. They are the people that call out the best in each of us, that encourage us and inspire us. More often than not, you don't even recognize how much they've done for you until you step back and take a broader look. And, also unfortunately, more often than not, they're powerful influence goes unheralded. Not this time. The staff at Robious Corridor Magazine decided that, in naming our Person of the Year for 2014, we would honor just such an individual. If any of you know John Sawyer (as I suspect many of you do), then you know he embodies exactly what we've been talking about.

Right now, if you visit the website of BridgingRVA.com (one of John's many charitable involvements) you'll find a video chronicling the efforts of that group, being led by John himself, to deliver 100 beds to 100 children in need of a comfortable place to sleep. During the inspiring video, a part of a quote appears briefly on screen. Here is the quote in its entirety: "We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world."

Small acts. Multiplied, maybe not yet by millions, but certainly within this community. That's how John enacts change. And while he'd probably be the first to discourage the use of the word, I do think that quote gets one thing wrong... those small acts... those are just as heroic as the ones most would consider more grand.

Take for example one particularly frigid night last January—and I'm not talking Richmond's normal level of cold: the forecast was for a low of 6° F. Knowing he was one of the pastors of Bon Air Baptist Church, Channel 8 called John hoping he might be able to offer them some info on where the homeless in the community could find warmth. John wasn't aware of any shelter, but



*John epitomizes what it means to be a friend and is a steadfast champion of helping others. He helps people learn to love one another and to reach out into the community. And it's not just talk, he puts things into action. John has helped so many individuals one at a time - I am one of them. He has a way of knowing when to reach out to you and he has an endless amount of empathy for your personal situation. He's a good listener and helps you see that there is always hope and the future is bright!*

*-Tom Patch*

**Continued on page 10 ►**







that didn't stop him from finding a way to help. He gathered some of his fellow church members, friends, family members and loaded up the back of a truck with blankets, water, hot coffee, and snacks and headed off to a local homeless camp in the woods to offer the supplies to anyone who might need them. His actions were much appreciated by those who were out there suffering through the bitter temperatures. But when asked about his efforts, John was his normal humble self, saying, "We're just a bunch of regular guys that care about this community."

That's just the kind of thing that John sees as being his responsibility as a part of this community. You see, he grew up in Chesterfield County, the fourth of five children. He now has a son, step-daughter and son-in-law and 3 grandchildren. So he knows a thing or two about being a part of a team, about the need for support and the need to offer help. And since he's been here his entire life, he's got a vested interest in devoting himself to making our community a better place. But couldn't a lot of us say that? Yet very few of us step up the way John has.

Ten years ago John was working in the agricultural and horticultural industry. He worked with professional growers from Maine to Florida. He was well liked and his career was what anyone would consider successful. Still he felt there was

something missing, or more specifically he felt like there was more he could be doing, like there was more to accomplish. At that time he was involved in his local church and had been recognized by church leaders for his natural ability to motivate others. He was asked to consider joining the ministry, and it seemed that maybe this was the change he'd been seeking. So starting in 2006 he began his journey, eventually earning his Masters Degree in Ministry Leadership



in 2012 from the seminary at Gorge Fox University.

It was there that John would first hear the Latin word *communitas* from one of his professors—and that word would help shape the way John went about his ministry, dictating what has become perhaps his defining message: that community can form around an idea, a task, or a challenge, drawing people together who might not have otherwise interacted. It is through that sense of *communitas* that things like

BridgingRVA.com came about.

Like so many of John's ideas, BridgingRVA.com probably first began as an idea discussed over coffee at a certain Seattle based coffee shop's Polo Place location. From there it grew to be a small group of friends meeting on Sunday nights. John wanted to find a way to bring people together, regardless of their religion, gender, or lifestyle to tackle community projects. Unfortunately, most charitable groups end up being rather homogenous, as the members are drawn from one place or group. John wanted to open that up. He wanted to give anyone with a genuine desire to help others a group that they could be proud to be a part of.

That's how John executes the projects. This idea was simple: deliver 100 beds to 100 children in need of a place to sleep. But even simple ideas don't always get off the ground... but if John's around, they do.

BridgingRVA.com was able to amass a group of 65+ people, many of them strangers (at least at first) to accomplish the task of collecting the beds, loading and unloading, delivering them and setting them up. The entire project was quite an undertaking. But the beautiful thing is that the children who received the beds were not the only ones who benefitted from the efforts. Everyone involved gained a sense of *communitas*.

**Continued on next page ►**



As his loving wife Lee Ann explains, part of the reason John is so willing and eager to help others is because he understands that everyone's life is a journey. He has been very open regarding his history with the disease of alcohol addiction. And after 23 years of living an alcohol free life during which he has remained involved with the recovering community, walking along side many that struggle with addictions of various kinds, John saw the value that a supportive community can play in restoring a person's life. John wanted to offer a place for recovery that was safe, restorative, and affordable.



More than that, he wanted it to offer hope. Out of that dream, The Bridge House was born. Quite simply, The Bridge House is a "transitional home" between becoming clean and sober and being fully engaged in mainstream life. John recognized a need in the community and set up a place that men can call a home and be proud of, while still receiving the kind of support that they need in those first months and years.

It's amazing to consider that John has done all of

**Continued on page 12 ►**



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*I frequently meet people at the Starbucks on Polo Place. John seems to be a fixture there. Sometimes he will come up and talk about the community – discussing my perception of unmet needs. Most of the time, however, John is in his own meetings. He is always counseling, mentoring or lifting the spirits of those he is with.*

*I was also privileged to be invited to be at a planning session for BridgingRVA.com. There John laid out his vision for how to connect groups of people who might not naturally come together in a network that would tackle specific issues in our community. John took a small idea and made it larger – putting into action the concept of rapid response teams that would react to specific and immediate situations.*

*The theory behind the strategy is straightforward. Providing individuals with a volunteer platform that does not require continued commitment increases the number of individuals willing to participate. Put people together in a situation where they have a discrete and realizable goal and social barriers will be overcome and the desire to participate is strengthened. The result – more interaction within our communities and the strengthening of those communities.*

*John is remarkably humble and committed. Although he is the force behind the movement, you would not know it from him. However, even a brief conversation with John regarding community service reveals his unbridled passion for this community.*

*-Dan Gecker*

this while still working to expand his worship community, the Bon Air Baptist Church – James River Campus (JRC). It was just eight years ago that John, along with 40 other adults, set out on that journey, beginning by meeting at James River High School on Sunday mornings. Now after 8 years of unloading chairs and tables before Sunday service, and reloading everything after, the JRC is developing a permanent site. Keeping together a worship community that has served at any given time as many as 300 people and has baptized more than 100 while operating without a permanent home has been a challenge to say the least. And none of it would have been possible without John's unflappable resolve. But now the group is reaping the benefits of their focus and commitment. The new facility is expected to be ready by early 2015.

This is just some of what John has been able to accomplish (so far... because we're sure there's more to come). It's a testament to John's influence and universal appeal that everyone we reached out to for input on this story was not only willing but enthusiastic about offering us an anecdote, endorsement, or testimonial

about him. We didn't hear, "He's a good guy." Well, we did. But that's not only what was said. Folks went on from there to tell us how he'd baptized their Grandmother at 90 years old, or how he'd helped them through dealing with a friend's terminal illness, or family tragedy. One story in particular, about him helping a member of his Thursday Night Men's Group check something off of his bucket list (getting to drive a Model T) was particularly touching. People were excited to gush about everything John has done for them, for their families, and for the community at large. We found ourselves weeding through it all, forcing ourselves to choose what to include, hoping to paint some portion of the image that is everything John has done.

So why did we choose a Person of the Year for 2014? The mission of Robious Corridor Magazine is to shine a bright light on this special place we call home... where we live, work, and go to school. We always look to highlight the unique and exceptional people in our inter-connected neighborhoods because in doing so we help create an

**Continued on next page ►**





even tighter knit community.

Choosing our 2014 Person of the Year was quite an undertaking. The big idea behind it was actually two, colliding, bigger ideas. For those who don't know John Sawyer, we wanted to introduce him. For those who do know John, we wanted to celebrate him.

But one thing was certain—we wanted to select someone who made the people around him better. You may have noticed the presence of the word bridge in many of the projects that John is a part of. And while that theme was probably meant as a nod to the connections we form as we build communities, in a lot of ways it could be seen as a reference to John himself. He connects people. He supports. He helps bridge the gaps in humanity and in ourselves that many of us are not even willing to acknowledge. And it is for that reason, and for so many more that he is our 2014 Person of the Year! ■



*John is real, genuine, sincere. I have seen him "care" for those in trouble or crisis when it was far from perfect timing in his own schedule. I see in him a care for the community in which he lives and ministers that goes far beyond the local church. -Tom Stocks*



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*"Light of the World, We praise your name as we celebrate this season of anticipation. We thank you that you have revealed yourself to us through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May there be room in our hearts to receive you. In this busy holiday season, let us remember this is a holy time. You have come to save us, to redeem us, to love us. Come Lord Jesus. Amen."*

A prayer for the Robious Corridor Community from Bob Cooper, Lead Pastor, Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church

# Church Services

## St. Edwards the Confessor Catholic Church

Near West Huguenot Road &  
Woodmont Drive  
804.272.2948

### December 24

4:00 pm - Christmas Liturgy  
6:30 pm - Christmas Liturgy  
8:30 pm - Christmas Liturgy  
11:30 pm - Christmas Carol Sing  
11:59 pm - Christmas Liturgy

### December 25

10:00am - Christmas Liturgy

## Episcopal Church of the Redeemer

2341 Winterfield Road  
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### December 14

Lessons & Carols at 5 pm  
The Christmas Story is recounted through  
Readings and Music featuring Redeemer's Choir

### December 17

7:00 pm - Celtic Christmas Service  
and Reception

### December 21

Christmas Pageant with Breakfast Singalong,  
Singalong at 9 am  
Children's Pageant at 10 am

### December 24

4:30 pm - Family Holy Eucharist  
8:00 pm - Festive Holy Eucharist with Choir  
10:30 pm - Festive Holy Eucharist with Choir

### December 25

10:00 am - Holy Eucharist



## Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church

1100 Mt. Pisgah Drive  
804.794.5856

### December 21

6:30 pm - Contemporary Christmas Celebration  
@6:30pm

### December 24

5:00 pm - Christmas Eve Service  
8:00 pm - Christmas Eve Service  
11:00 pm - Christmas Eve Service

## Bon Air Baptist Church James River Campus

(Currently worshipping in the  
Commons at our Buford Rd Campus  
until our new facility is ready.)  
3700 James River Road

### December 24

5:30 pm  
7:30 pm  
10:00 pm

## Bon Air Baptist Church

2531 Buford Road  
804.272.1475

### December 24

5:30 pm  
7:30 pm  
10:00 pm



## Salisbury Presbyterian Church

13621 West Salisbury Road  
804.794.4476

### December 24

4:00 pm - Families with Children's Service  
6:00 pm and 11:00 pm - (Communion)

## Winfree Baptist Church

13617 Midlothian Turnpike  
804.794.5031

### December 24

4:00 pm & 6:00 pm - Contemporary Worship  
Service & Pageant  
8:00 pm - Traditional Worship Service

## Church of the Epiphany Roman Catholic Church

11000 Smoketree Drive  
804.794.0222

### December 24

4:00 pm, 7:00 pm, and 10:00 pm  
- Eve Masses

### December 25

11:00 am - Christmas Day Mass

### January 1

11:00 am - New Year's Day

## Bon Air United Methodist Church

1645 Buford Road  
804.272.2042

### December 24

5 pm - Family Service  
7 pm - Candle Light Service  
11 pm - Candle Light Service



## THE VIRGINIA MYSTERIES – KIDS' ADVENTURES FILLED WITH LOCAL HISTORY.



Legend says that the haunting lights over the rapids on the James River at night are the ghosts of long-dead soldiers still fighting the Civil War. Just past the water lies historic Belle Isle, the former Union soldier prisoner-of-war camp, now a Richmond park filled with crumbling ruins and dark wooded trails. Add a run-in with a notorious confederate biker gang, visits to Tredegar Iron Works, Hollywood Cemetery, and other local landmarks and what do you get? The perfect setting for *Ghosts of Belle Isle*, Book 3 in The Virginia Mysteries, by local author Steven K. Smith.

Targeted for middle-grade readers ages 7-12, the series has been described as part Magic Tree House, part Hardy Boys. The stories follow young brothers Sam and Derek and their friends on adventures that often include a twist of local Virginia history. Featured locations include St. John's Church, Hollywood Cemetery, Belle Isle, Tredegar Iron Works, and Colonial Williamsburg, as well as famous names like Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Patrick Henry, George Wythe, and Jefferson Davis. The books have been a hit

with elementary students at several local schools, through reading programs, book clubs and other events.

Smith moved to the Robious Corridor with his wife, Mary, and three sons in the spring of 2011. An avid writer, he began blogging at MyBoys3.com when his youngest was born as a way to capture the adventures of raising three young boys. Blog posts soon turned into bedtime stories for his kids, and eventually became his first book, *Summer of the Woods*, published in spring 2013. When it was selected as last year's One School, One Book title at Bettie Weaver Elementary, families throughout the area followed Sam and Derek's first adventure, which was tied to Midlothian's local mining history and a search for rare nineteenth-century coins.

Smith ratcheted up the connections to local history with his second book in the series, *Mystery on Church Hill*. Set at Richmond's historic St. John's Church and in Colonial Williamsburg, the story has the brothers embark on a hunt for a lost artifact from our nation's history before it lands in the wrong hands. Throughout

the summer, Smith participated in weekly book signings at St. John's historical reenactments and at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor's Center.

As the 150th anniversary of Richmond's pivotal role in the conclusion of the Civil War approaches this spring, *Ghosts of Belle Isle* places readers in the heart of the action. "History gets a bad rap with kids," says Smith, "but when you meld it into an exciting story, they love it." As for the reason the New Jersey transplant chose to weave pieces of Virginia's history into his stories, Smith says it's hard not to do so. "There are so many ideas throughout the Richmond area that drip with history. Amazing parts of our nation's history are right in our backyard that are perfect stories for kids."

The Virginia Mysteries are available in paperback or Kindle versions on Amazon.com, as well as locally at Bella Arte Gallery (corner of Winterfield and Robious Roads), and the visitors' centers at St. John's Church and Colonial Williamsburg. You can visit Smith's website at [VirginiaMysteries.com](http://VirginiaMysteries.com) for more information. ■



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# Day Tripping: The Omni Grove Park Inn

By Libby Carty McNamee

Coming around the bend, my first glimpse of the historic Omni Grove Park Inn nearly made me swoon. Perched on the side of a mountain, the exquisite granite building with its red clay roof looked straight out of a fairy tale. With a row of rocking chairs in front and the city of Asheville below, the sight was a feast for my road-weary eyes.

Entering the Great Hall was an equally stunning experience. With its cavernous fourteen-foot fireplaces and original “arts and crafts” furniture, it was truly awe-inspiring. A stroll onto the adjoining Sunset Terrace showcased a panoramic view of the glorious Blue Ridge Mountains lining the horizon like a postcard. Displayed in all their

breathtaking glory, they do indeed have a distinct blue-ish haze.

Brimming with old world charm, it's no wonder F. Scott Fitzgerald stayed at the Inn for months at a time to carouse under the guise of seeking inspiration. His former room, Suite 441, is still up for grabs. Alas, the damage he caused by firing his handgun has been repaired. The Inn has also received many other famous visitors including several American Presidents, Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison for whom their superb new bar-kitchen is named. In addition, there are a number of other restaurants on the grounds, ranging from fine dining to casual. All are nothing short of superb. It was a wonder my pants could

button at the end of the trip.

If you have the opportunity, the Christmas Season is an especially wonderful time to visit. With the scent of evergreen, sugar, and spice in the air, the Inn decks the halls in spectacular style. With enormous wreaths above, the massive fireplaces glow and crackle as they burn massive logs up to 12-feet long. The holiday cheer is abundant with elaborate decorations and 80 decorated trees throughout the property with daily carols sung by the employee choir.

In addition, the Omni Grove Park Inn has the distinct honor of hosting the

**Continued on next page ►**





Annual National Gingerbread House Competition through January 1. Come see the many over-the-top creations vying for first prize! There are well over 200 of them! This would be a great activity for the week before New Year's Eve when crowds have dwindled.

Even if you are not a "spa person," a trip to the Inn's 43,000 square foot spa is an unforgettable experience. Plus an amazing treatment could help you forget the stress of Christmas! A long dark cave-like tunnel leads you towards the entrance, and that is only the beginning. Be sure to bring a suit to luxuriate in the multiple mineral pools and waterfalls complete with underwater music.

Well, in all honesty, there is one downside to a stay at the Inn. No matter where you go, your next hotel will seem downright shabby. Trust me, though, the disappointment will be sooo worth it! The drive to Asheville is an easy one, but be sure to allocate six hours from

Midlo. Don't dawdle along the way because you will want to savor every moment at this amazing destination.

While you are there, don't miss out on the city of Asheville! Home of the legendary Biltmore Estate, it's amazingly hip and artsy with a funky, urban vibe. The bustling downtown is teeming with refreshingly eclectic shops and art galleries without a chain store in sight. There is even a bakery for dogs! That's one to mull over that at the local "chocolate lounge" with some salted caramel hot chocolate. After a trip like that, you may never come home! ■

**Libby McNamee** is plotting her return to the Omni Grove Park Inn. They haven't seen the last of her yet! Check out her blog "Libby With a Y" at [www.libbymcnaee.com](http://www.libbymcnaee.com)



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# Cruisin' the Corridor: Got Boxes?

*By Libby Carty McNamee*



When it's moving time, boxes become cardboard gold. It's a lot like speed dating as you assess each one. Is it big enough? Firm on the bottom? Secure on the top? Too worn out? I even found myself consumed with "box envy" while looking at the fancy ones on display at U-Haul.

It sure is strange trying to fit your life into a cardboard box! I guess that's why "move" is a four-letter word. Plus deep down, you know packing up is just one of the many major changes about to fly at you all at once. Even if most are for the better, it brings along such a strange feeling of dread and upheaval. No matter where you've been living, you're always leaving some sort of familiarity behind. Familiarity is one of the best kinds of comfort; just ask a toddler to trade his shredded blankie for a new one.

Moving is like being trapped in a batting cage gone wild. Balls just keep coming at you, one after another in a never-ending stream. As much as you want to give up, you've got to keep swinging. Finally though, you feel like you just can't swing anymore. All you want to do is cover your face and hide in the corner. Alas, you can't because the balls still keep coming, one after another. It's all got to get done. And when it is

finally and mercifully over, it's time for a few drinks to dull the pain and your throbbing head. Santa, if you are reading this, I'd love some tequila in my stocking and an elf to help me find the blender.

Perhaps this musing makes you suspect we may have plans to move. If so, you are right on it, my friend. It's true. We are leaving the planet of Robious Corridor and heading out into the stratosphere to Austin, Texas. Many would argue that Texas is a galaxy in itself, all of them Texans. Hey, it's another state capitol with a river running through town. Can't be all bad, right?

We are all really excited for our new adventure, but sometimes it feels like someone is pulling my fingernails off, one by one. After a dozen years on the Corridor, the roots run deep. It's home. (Just realized "home" is also a four-letter

word. Must ruminate on that one.)

When the possibility of Austin first arose, bizarre disjointed thoughts ran thru my mind. "Texas? But you have to get on a plane just to get out of there! But I love our mailman -- and the bus driver! And what about Robious Corridor? Everyone knows me at Martin's Pharmacy! We can't move!" With a flash I remembered my beloved mini-Martin's was closing down anyway, morphing into yet another "big box" grocery store along Midlothian Turnpike. So that one was okay.

Then, I got a tad more rational which only made it harder. The faces of my closest friends flashed through my mind, and the dam broke. The tears started rolling. Having lived in Richmond since

**Continued on next page →**



2000, I've made some great friends. Many of them I don't see often, but there's pleasure in knowing they're out there and we *could* get together.

On our first trip to Austin, I was all geared up to not like it. After all, I've never been a huge fan of Texas after seeing Dallas. To me it's flat, barren land peppered with strip malls laid out like a game of Scrabble. In all honesty, though, I pretty much caved on Austin right away. Yes, I was sold even before we left their oh-so-funky airport. Man, the restaurants there were better than in most cities! In my defense, I didn't shout, "Go Longhorns!" or anything, but I may have been thinking it a little bit. How can you not love a town whose slogan is "Keep Austin Weird," seriously? It's hip and hilly with lots of trees, amazing

barbeque, and live music everywhere, even at the grocery store. True story, heard and saw it myself.

Of course, the Tex-Mex in Austin is divine, plate-licking good. After each meal I couldn't help saying, "Wow! Now *that* was the best Tex-Mex I've ever had!" Then our son would blurt out, usually in front of the waiter, "I like the one on Midlothian Turnpike! Their tortillas are much better!" So let's hear it for El Cerro Azul, beating out the very cradle of Tex-Mex! They have one loyal patron with a distinguished palate. I'm already wondering if they'd FedEx us some tortillas when Sam gets a little homesick for them.

Even though it's hard to be the "new girl" especially when (late) forty-

something, starting over does have its perks. It's a great chance to reinvent yourself as a whole new you. I'm thinking of going by "Beyonce" and taking up pole dancing. In the meantime, if you have any spare boxes, we can use 'em, lots of 'em. We've got lots of marvelous Midlo memories to pack away. And we've always got Facebook, right?

PS The Grand Poobah at Robious Corridor is going to let me keep on writing, so I'll still be "Cruising the Corridor," at least in my mind. That's "winning" to me. ■

Check out Libby's blog "Libby With a Y" at [www.LibbyMcNamee.com](http://www.LibbyMcNamee.com), soon to be renamed "Beyonce With a Y."



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# *It's Just My Opinion...* SHOP LOCAL!

The holiday season is here and it means only one thing: spending money you don't have on things that other people don't want. I don't mean to be a Scrooge, but I believe gifting has become a sickness. Just like the flesh-eating virus, it's a relentless parasite spread by commercial spokespeople, morning show hosts and internet pop-up ads. As hard as it may be to ignore the hard sell of late-night infomercials, smooth-talking QVC pitch people or catchy pop song commercials for the latest digital gadget, I must resist.

Okay, who am I kidding? Only the genuinely poor and pathologically cynical won't spend money on gifts this year. Me? I'll just moan and make empty promises to "get creative" and "thrifty," but end up mumbling as I "click" deeper into debt filling my Amazon shopping cart.

But the way I figure it, if I'm going to spend money for the sake of spending money, I can at least make it make a difference – so I'll spend my money on small businesses in the Robious Corridor that keep Christmas cash in close circulation.

First, I'll support my local drug dealers. Don't get all bent out of shape, I'm not suggesting stuffing stockings full of narcotics. That's illegal, wrong, and way too expensive. But I will brighten the lives of my family and friends with perfectly legal (and local) mood-altering substances. I'll pay it forward with some Pinot Grigio for the wine-lovers I know – thanks Total Wine.

Ever wondered where exactly is Hickory Farms? Does anyone know for sure that it isn't in like North Korea? Can you trust two strangers named Harry and David with your fruit? And isn't there something inherently strange about getting sausages in the mail?

These are all good questions and I can't answer any of them. So, I've pre-ordered delicious gift assortments from Edible Arrangements, over by SteinMart, can't wait to pick them up.

Everyone knows you can shop the entire world from the comfort of your own home thanks to the Internet (and Al Gore). Big deal. I'm doing local businesses a solid. Shopping for things you can actually hold in your hand while engaging with actual live human beings is an age-old practice that has endured for generations. The Shoppes at Bellgrade and Sycamore Square need local customers, so does WestChester Commons. So I'm keeping most of that Amazon money in my backyard. Besides, Jeff Bezos will just spend it on another robot butler anyway.

Y'all remember charity? Giving money to people who need it more than you? Charity is a hip gift these days, especially among the well-to-do who already have enough hybrid sports cars and Swiss dive watches. Local charities need the love, so I plan to drop a small bundle into a local non-profit. Turning my selfless gesture into a gift makes me seem even more selfless. So I'll simply donate a few bucks in the name of a co-worker and then let them know with a humble but tasteful card. Because saying, "I gave \$20 to a panhandler on Midlothian Turnpike for you" doesn't count.

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# Less Can Really Be More At Holiday Time

By Ann Marie Griffith

I think many of us worry about all the extras associated with this time of year.

Gifts, decorations, family feasts, special holiday events, charitable donations — they all add up in the checkbook. I'm no economist, but let's face it, times are still tough for many. We often don't have the extra funds to do it all. And is it ALL necessary?

Experts tell us it's okay to adopt a "less is more" attitude during this season — not just with the material stuff, but also with the hectic schedules and high expectations that often go hand-in-hand with the holidays. Scaling back can mean less stress and more time to relax and enjoy the season. I often remind myself that I don't have to set a table like Martha Stewart or create the picture-perfect

holiday card. I don't need to bake a dozen different cookies (even though my grandmother does). I don't need to shop for multiple, unique presents for each member of my extended family when gift cards would be equally appreciated.

When I think back to my Christmases as a child, I rarely recall what Santa brought. What I do remember are the sights, sounds, smells and tastes that we shared as a family: Watching my mom shape her sweet Christmas bread into golden-brown braided wreaths and candy canes. Listening to Frank Sinatra and the Beach Boys croon carols from the dining room record player. Helping my dad string lights over the garage (usually in frigid Pennsylvania weather) and hunt for last-minute stocking stuffers (he loved to shop on Christmas



Eve). My mom, sister and I wearing handmade, matching aprons. Savoring a holiday meal that we each had a part in preparing and that combined our Italian and Ukrainian heritages.

I'll try to think about these memories when I ask myself "did I do enough?" and "do I have enough?" under the tree this year. My children have a knack for reminding me about what's important to them. Sure, they delight in writing wish lists and opening gifts, but they also love the weeks leading up to Christmas — decorating the tree, counting down the days on their Advent calendars, watching timeless holiday specials on television, piecing together our annual gingerbread abode, cruising around for festive lights after church services, and sprinkling glittery reindeer food in the back yard.

These are the things I look forward to most, and I'm glad they do, too.

Happy Holidays!

*Ann Marie Griffith is a local writer, editor and mom who loves watching "The Year Without a Santa Claus" and can often be heard singing the Heat and Snow Miser songs around her house. ■*

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# Husband & Life: 'Tis the Season

By Matthew R. Strange

In my family, we march. Sounds like an odd (you might say *Strange*) holiday tradition, but we've been doing it for over 30 years now, so I don't think it's going to stop any time soon. "What do you mean you march?" Is that what you're wanting to ask... OK, yeah, that's a fair question. I mean that we march—we line up (it used to be just 6 of us, but now there are 15 of us) and we march around the house like some idiot brigade of merry men and women. Why do we do this? Because on the mix of Christmas music my father put together way back when there is a song called Parade of the Wooden Soldiers, and in that song, at one point, the Narrator announces, "Standby! Here come the wooden soldiers on parade. You march with them!" That is why we march. Because we are told to do so.

Back when my oldest brother was still a little kid he heard that announcement and followed the directions. My parents, thinking it was cute and funny, joined him. When my other brother came along and was old enough to march, he got in line. Then came my sister, then me... and now all the rest. For us it hasn't been a Christmas season unless we've all stepped in time to that silly song, laughing as we stomp about my parent's house in New Jersey. But it's not just when we're all back at our childhood home. We've taken the show on the road.

As adults we've brought that tradition with us into our own homes, exposed our spouses and our children to it. And that's a good thing. It's good goofy fun. Now that I have a daughter of my own, I'm excited to share this kind of thing with her. But I also want to be sure that we develop our own...

Of course, traditions will develop on their own. There's no need to force it. My daughter will likely lead me and my wife into some new metaphorical march. But what I'm worried about, specifically at this time of year, is making room for those new traditions. When we travel to spend time with my relatives up North, or even into the West End to visit my wife's family, what we're doing is reducing the amount of time for us.

So my wife and I have come up with 3 things we're going to do to try and be sure that we have our own traditions:

- 1.) When we're in town for Christmas, we're going to continue to do the one thing that is already sort of a tradition for us (and a few thousand other people in and around RVA): go to the Byrd Theatre to see *It's a Wonderful Life*.
- 2.) Once our daughter is old enough, we're going to pay close attention to anything unique that she likes to do around the holidays and be sure to keep doing that. Essentially we're just



committing to letting her define at least one of our traditions no matter how small it may seem to us.

- 3.) We want to be sure to have time to ourselves every year around the holidays. With parties and traveling and people visiting, it can be hard to get quiet time with just your immediate family unit... we're going to our best to set aside time for just us.

Of course much of this kind of thinking is a little premature, and the need for it probably at least a year away. Right now my daughter could easily fit inside one of the stockings I'm going to be hanging up soon, so I'm not sure she cares much about when or if we march, or about what traditions will become our own. We just figure it's better to be prepared, better to establish this way of thinking early. That way when she does decide that she wants us all to don Santa hats to go for a walk around the neighborhood at Midnight every year on Christmas Eve... we'll know it's the start of something special. The Strange traditions march on. ■



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# Mediterraneo

Pizzeria & Restaurant

3730 Winterfield Drive  
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**794 - 5350**  
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Online ordering available!



*Happy Holidays*

TO ALL OF OUR CUSTOMERS!

Delivery and full service catering available!  
We now accept personal checks.



## Nightly Specials

### Sunday & Monday

½ Price Wine Bottles  
Dine-In Only

### Tuesday

½ Price Pizza  
(Toppings regular price)  
Dine-In or Take-Out

### Wednesday

Pasta Night \$10 Per Person  
(Choose from  
Chef Selections)  
Dine-In or Take-Out

### Thursday

Date Night \$60 Per Couple  
(3 Course Meal &  
Bottle of Wine)  
Dine-In Only



2 Large  
2-Topping  
Pizzas  
only \$22.00

Two Can Dine  
for \$22.00

Choose from: Lasagna, Spaghetti w/  
Meatballs, Penne Ragu, Tortellini  
(meat or cheese) with Marinara Sauce  
or Fettucini Alfredo (Choice of 2 with  
Large House Salad to Share)



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