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QUEEN CITY NERVE



The Love Below

Tracei's debut album 'MOOD' uplifts romance & self-love

By Tyler Bunzey

NEWS: I-77 toll lane plans cause disruption, debate ◊ PG. 4

ARTS: Germôna Sharp does it all ◊ PG. 7

FOOD: Beyond Amazing Donuts stands strong ◊ PG. 10

OPINION: Wrestling with Cesar Chavez's tarnished legacy ◊ PG. 14

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEWS & OPINION

4. Erosion of Trust by Ryan Pitkin
Community members, local officials, NCDOT continue to bump heads over I-77 toll lanes

6. Lifeline: Ten Cool Things To Do in Two Weeks

ARTS & CULTURE

7. No Ceilings by Pat Moran
Multi-hyphenate talent Germôna Sharp continues to expand on her repertoire

MUSIC

8. Soundwave

9. The Love Below by Tyler Bunzey
Tracei's debut album 'MOOD' uplifts romance and self-love

FOOD & DRINK

10. Standing Strong by Ryan Pitkin
Jasmine Macon remains resilient to keep Beyond Amazing Donuts thriving

LIFESTYLE

12. Horoscope
12. Puzzles
14. Nerve Endings
15. Savage Love



Residents look over a potential toll lane design at a NCDOT meeting in fall 2025. Photo by Ryan Pitkin

EROSION OF TRUST

Community members, local officials continue to bump heads with NCDOT over I-77 toll lanes

BY RYAN PITKIN

The Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO) met on March 25 amid growing opposition to the I-77 South toll lane project, which will involve constructing toll lanes along an 11-mile stretch of I-77 from the South Carolina state line to I-277.

The meeting came days after NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) officials canceled a scheduled tour of the areas that will be impacted by the highway expansion, citing safety concerns.

Charlotte City Council member Ed Driggs, the city's representative on the transportation board, encouraged his colleagues at the meeting to wait for more answers from the state before moving to halt or cancel the project, which has already been paused to provide NCDOT more time to gather public feedback.

A special Charlotte City Council meeting called on the Tuesday preceding the meeting to discuss the project was canceled the next morning.

In a live chat on the YouTube live stream of the CRTPO meeting, Charlotte's District 6 rep Kimberly Owens expressed her disappointment that the meeting was canceled, stating council members did not get a chance to inform Driggs of their thoughts on where things stood.

As he has during city council meetings, Driggs took the opportunity at the meeting to cite a 2025 CRTPO vote that gave NCDOT the green light to move forward with the project, one that he said gave the body 60 days to rescind their support and limited their authority to do so after that window had passed.

That vote followed a 2024 decision to support a P3 funding model for the highway expansion, which mixes private and public funding through the implementation of toll lanes. Driggs emphasized that the community backlash did not start until potential designs for the project were released in fall 2025.

Mecklenburg County commissioner Leigh Altman, the county's representative on CRTPO, said at the meeting that she has continuously invited NCDOT to present to the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners to address three areas of concern: impacts to communities along the I-77 South corridor; environmental effects including impacts to Mecklenburg County properties and parks; and potential alternatives to the toll lane model.

A recent analysis by county staff found that the expansion would likely impact 11 parks, four greenway corridors, multiple streams and wetlands while exposing nearby residents to higher levels of traffic pollution.

"I certainly have experienced an eroding of trust in this process," Altman said. "And so some of those conversations and some of the facts or principles that we were talking about a year ago, I'm frankly less confident about because some of the things that have come out since then really haven't stood up under scrutiny, and that has harmed trust for me."

The state has its say

Stephen Rosenburgh, a member of CRTPO and the NC Board of Transportation, emphasized at the meeting that the design phase for the project is still in its early stages and insisted that the NCDOT is still working to minimize community impacts.

He dismissed alternative options such as building a tunnel ("It's impossible financially and you take out a lot more land.") or investing in more public transit to help with highway congestion ("We don't have enough people riding existing public transit.").

Rosenburgh warned that canceling the project would damage NCDOT's relationship with the city of Charlotte, repeatedly citing the city's opposition despite the fact that the broader CRTPO is the body responsible for negotiating with the state.

He said NCDOT has committed $700 million to the project and has already spent around $50 million on it, money that can't be used for some other project in Charlotte.

"We have to accept the realities; tunneling is not going to work, a train is not going to work," said Rosenburgh. "We've got $600 million, we've got another $100 million and we've got some community benefits. Beyond that, I can't assure you of a lot of things, but I can assure you the legislature is not giving any more money to this city.

"If the city doesn't want this project, Raleigh will take this $600 [million] plus $100 million tomorrow. Greensboro will take it tomorrow," he continued. "It's not being allocated to another project. It is leaving the city and it won't be coming back."

Other CRTPO members from municipalities in the greater Charlotte area expressed regret about the body's previous support for the project during the meeting, calling on NCDOT to find a compromise that takes community opposition into account and minimizes impacts.

Cornelius commissioner and CRTPO rep Michael Osborne challenged Rosenburgh's claims that the project was needed to relieve congestion along the southern stretch of I-77, citing the failure of the toll lanes constructed along the northern stretch of Mecklenburg County to have any such effect.

"We talked a little bit about trust and, you know why there's distrust out there," said Osborne. "I think it's because they see that we already implemented a P3 in the north and there were expectations it relieved traffic and it didn't. It's a fact, it's not an opinion."

Davidson Mayor Rusty Knox agreed, pointing out that I-77 North becomes a "parking lot" between Exit 16 in Charlotte and Exit 30 during rush hour despite the toll lanes along that stretch.

Mineral Springs Mayor and CRTPO member Frederick Becker acknowledged that the construction of I-77 and I-277 have "hamstrung" Charlotte and hindered its growth.

"It's not a necklace, it's a noose," he said of the highway.

He echoed a suggestion from Davidson Mayor Rusty Knox that state officials explore a "cap-and-stitch" model in which infrastructure is built over sunken highways so as to reconnect communities torn about by their construction.

"That would create a much more beautiful city if that were capped and stitched," Becker said. "If you eliminated the Trade and 4th [streets] interchange so that everything could ... be covered, you suddenly have a wide-open vista where Charlotte can grow again."

Community members continue to speak out

NCDOT reps canceled a tour of the neighborhoods that will be impacted by the highway expansion that was scheduled for Monday, claiming they were worried for their safety.

Though details are unclear, the agency likely learned that word had gotten out about their tour and expected to be confronted by neighbors who have been passionately opposing the proposed project for months.

An NCDOT spokesperson said the cancellation was "due to potential circumstances that could not be safely accommodated," according to reporting from WFAE.

Sean Langley, president of the McCrorey Heights neighborhood association, has been at the forefront of opposition to the proposed toll lane project.

A number of the potential designs presented in fall 2025 involved the razing of homes in McCrorey Heights, a historically Black neighborhood.

At the meeting, Langley took issue with recent NCDOT assurances that "only 5%" of the community would be impacted by the project.

"Don't fall victim to NCDOT saying that this project doesn't harm 95% of the community,"



A potential design for the I-77 toll lane project released by NCDOT in fall 2025. Courtesy of NCDOT



Community members along the project corridor have been speaking against the plans since their release. Ryan Pitkin

Langley told CRTPO members during the public forum segment of the March 25 meeting. "It harms us psychologically by having a physical barrier, a concrete barrier next to our homes. It harms us environmentally by having pollution, by having noise, by our quality of life. It certainly decreases our property value."

Langley called on CRTPO to commission an independent transportation analysis to explore alternative options to the toll lanes, citing the recent county study that found emissions rates are 19% higher for neighborhoods that abut I-77.

"Please take that into consideration for myself, our families, our seniors, and countless other individuals that love our community and want the best for it," said Langley.

NCDOT opens Community Engagement Center, releases new designs

NCDOT has taken some action in response to the community outcry, including releasing new potential designs that would lessen impact on surrounding communities. Without much prior notice, the agency published the designs on March 30, shortly before this issue of Queen City Nerve went to print.

If built as they were released, the new designs would eliminate all impacts to McCrorey Heights, Biddleville and Wesley Heights, though some homes in Wilmore and along West Boulevard would still stand in the way of the project, as was first reported by WSOC's Joe Bruno before their release.



After this meeting, NCDOT selected a plan with "least community impacts" but recently released another. Ryan Pitkin

The release came after the announcement in February that NCDOT had already chosen the "least impactful design" possible.

Upon news of the pause in the RFP process in early March, Sustain Charlotte, a local environmental advocacy organization that has joined neighbors in opposing the toll lane project, announced the launch of "Reimagining 77 South: A Vision for Repairing and Reconnecting Charlotte," a public design challenge inviting residents, designers and students to imagine new possibilities for the I-77 corridor through Charlotte.

With a submission deadline of April 6, community members are invited to submit visual concepts that reimagine how the corridor could better serve Charlotte's neighborhoods, environment and future growth.

Ideas may include freeway caps or tunnels, parks and greenways, new walking and biking connections, restored waterways or other approaches that reconnect communities and improve quality of life, according to a release announcing the challenge.

Selected submissions will be displayed at a free public exhibit on April 13 at the Dubois Center at UNC Charlotte Center City, part of a free public event called How the Cities We Build Shape How We Live.

"For decades, highways built through cities divided neighborhoods and limited opportunity," said Shannon Binns, founder and executive director of Sustain Charlotte. "This challenge invites local residents to imagine what it could look like to repair past harm and reconnect our communities, as so many other cities have already begun to do."

Also on March 30, Mayor Vi Lyles and other city leaders joined NCDOT reps to open the state agency's I-77 South Express Lanes Community Engagement Center. Located within the project corridor at 1023 West Morehead St., Ste. 150, the center aims to help make it more accessible and viable for neighbors to provide feedback on the evolving plans.

"The Community Engagement Center is meant to be a place where we can listen, learn and lead together," stated NCDOT Secretary Daniel Johnson in a release announcing the opening. "We recognize the importance of understanding both the urgent transportation needs of this corridor and the lived experiences of the communities along it. That perspective is essential as we move forward, and we remain committed to open dialogue with the community as the project develops."

The center will serve as an ongoing resource and meeting space for surrounding communities, providing project information, offering one-on-one meetings with NCDOT staff, and creating opportunities to discuss potential community enhancements and beneficial programs, according to the NCDOT release.

Visitors can make virtual and in-person appointments online at tinyurl.com/I-77EngagementCenter or by calling 1-800-254-0498. Drop-in appointments are also available while the center is open from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Mondays-Fridays and 9 a.m.-1 p.m. on Saturdays.

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- Snap a few photos of your outdoor space.
- Email them to info@qcnerve.com with the subject line "My Backyard."
- Optional: add 2–3 sentences about what inspired your outdoor space or what you love most about it.

Selected yards will be featured in our upcoming **Charlotte Summer Outdoor Living Guide** in print and online.

LIFELINE

INDIGO DE SOUZA, MOTHÉ

April 1 • 8 p.m. • Underground, 820 Hamilton St. • $31 • fillmorenc.com

Amid skittering electronics, jittery polyrhythms and synths that suggest an iceberg shearing into glassy shards, Asheville-based artist Indigo De Souza's breathy vocals trill on her tempest-tossed 2026 single "Come to God." As intimate as a journal entry, as disjointed as a dream that jolts you upright in bed, De Souza's songs confront and embrace their 2023 borderline personality disorder diagnosis and celebrate their subsequent mental health journey, which is marked by the artist's pursuit of community and universal consciousness. Drawing on noise, hip-hop and alternative rock, Mothé crafts bouncy, off-kilter pop gems like "Popstar" and "Serious," a mysterious, shimmering collaboration with De Souza.

'KING HEDLEY II'

April 2-5 • times vary • JCSU The Arts Factory, 1545 W. Trade St. • $32 • bnsproductions.org

King Hedley II is the ninth in playwright August Wilson's 10-part American Century Cycle chronicling the 20th-century Black American experience. Each play in the cycle is set in a different decade in Pittsburgh's historically Black Hill District. This iteration, taking place in 1985, may be the most harrowing chapter in the saga. In a neighborhood blasted by decay and urban blight, a physically and emotionally scarred ex-con — the play's titular king — daydreams with his friend Mister about opening a kung-fu video rental store using the money they make selling stolen refrigerators. Wilson's darkest, most symbolic play grapples with justice, dreams deferred and ghosts of generations past.

BLAIR, POLO PERKS, DORIS, PHAZE GAWD

April 3 • 8 p.m. • Milestone, 3400 Tuckaseegee Rd. • $18 • themilestone.club

Whether it's the plangently strummed, blissed out "Propeller," or the swoony, blurry, "Newdesigner," NYC's Blair crafts unhurried slacker rock. The band's electronica and psychedelia-drenched concoctions evoke the blissed-out afterburn of the Velvet Underground's "Sunday Morning." Propelled by a twangy one-string '60s spy-movie guitar riff, Polo Perks' *South Park* shout out "Who Killed Kenny" is spare and unsettling psychedelic rap. Lo-fi Brooklyn rappers Doris employ warped old-school soul samples and gremlin-like murmuring on the elliptical and dreamlike "Usher." Coupling raw lyricism with hypnotic new-age hip-hop, Charlotte's Phaze Gawd is the perfect capstone to this experimental yet engaging lineup.

PEEKABOO

April 4 • 10 p.m. • Black Box Theater, 421 E. Sugar Creek Road • $43-$58 • blackboxcharlotte.com

While attending college, PEEKABOO studied to become an audio engineer for horror films. You can certainly catch the connection in the title track of his 2026 LP *Are We Dreaming*. Amid an eerie, oscillating and building bed that would be perfect for the scene when some idiot goes into the basement like a lamb to the slaughter, a oneiric, echoing woman's voice repeats the track's title as skittering electro beats seep into this slow burning creepfest. Call it dubstep, freeform bass or space bass, PEEKABOO's carved out a successful EDM subgenre with playful yet menacing tracks like "BADDERS" and "6 Million."

'ASHES TO ART'

April 7 • 6 p.m. • Independent Picture House, 4237 Raleigh St. • Free, donations accepted • independentpicturehouse.org

Before 1999, the future McColl Center was a burnt out husk of a church. The nearly century-old space has changed a lot since then, and is now a haven for a diverse range of budding artists. The film *Ashes to Art* captures former McColl artist-in-residence Marcus Schubert's 1999 performance, which recreated the 1984 fire that gutted the church and set the stage for the space's phoenix-like rebirth as open studio spaces for artists. The screening will be followed by a Q&A and an interdisciplinary response by Charlotte artists Dylan Gilbert, de'Angelo Dia and Rahquelah Conyers that weaves together sound art, poetry and dance.

LAVAGEM CELEBRATION

April 9-12 • times vary • Mint Museum Uptown, 500 S. Tryon St. • Free • mintmuseum.org

Launched in 1773, the Lavagem do Bonfim is an inter-religious celebration in Salvador, capital city in the Brazilian state of Bahia, where devotees wash the steps of the Church of Our Lord of Bonfim. It has since expanded into a community event that symbolizes renewal and unity. Charlotte's Lavagem Celebration is a four-day cultural festival that honors African Brazilian, Indigenous Caboclos, and African diasporic traditions through dance, music and educational workshops. The opening day celebration on April 9 includes a drum workshop, drum circle, and an honoring of Caboclos land. On April 12, the Mint hosts the fest's closing celebration, featuring Brazilian drumming, an instrumental jam and more.



Phaze Gawd
Photo by Honey Monroe
4/3



Indigo De Souza
Photo by David Lee
4/1

VALLEY RANGE, LIL SKRITT, HNY WLSN

April 10 • 9 p.m. • Petra's, 1919 Commonwealth Ave. • $10 • petrasbar.com

Launched by singer-songwriter Ryan McKusick, Valley Range dropped the 2019 track "Normal Folks," a driving melodic slice of pop-rock with a soupçon of grit. Harder rocking, with propulsive drums and even more grit, agitated 2025 single "Trampled" is Valley Range's best realized song to date. Blending electronica with indie pop, Queen City producer/singer-songwriter HNY WLSN crafts gems ranging from the bright, percolating "Donetsk" to the heartfelt and romantic collaboration with Florecienta, "Valle Del Amore." Charlotte experimental rapper-turned-country artist Lil' Skritt boasts an impressive range into a repertoire that is always leavened with Skritt's offbeat sense of humor.

KATT WILLIAMS

April 11 • 8 p.m. • Spectrum Center, 333 E Trade St. • $83-$155 • spectrumcentercharlotte.com

The question isn't if Trump had a stroke, Katt Williams maintains, the question is how many strokes. "Up stroke, down stroke, side stroke," Williams says in a recent stand-up routine. "He's had everything but a stroke of luck." In a 2025 *Club Shay Shay* interview, Williams said he was reading by the age of 3 and is proficient in French and Haitian Creole. That's not hard to believe, as Williams is a fiercely intelligent performer and gifted storyteller who laces his comic observations with biting social commentary. Williams has taken on conspiracies, censorship, and America's cult of celebrity, refusing to back down from controversial topics like criticizing Charlie Kirk's bigotry.

CHARLOTTE STREATS FESTIVAL

April 12 • noon-5 p.m. • First Ward Park, 301 E. 7th St. • Free • cltstreatsfestival.com

The big news for StrEATs Festival, the foodie subset of Charlotte SHOUT!, is that Chef Jamie Lynch of Church & Union and La Belle Helene will host a cooking demonstration and emcee StrEATs' Neighborhood Cook-off Finals. In addition to that event, where contestants vie for the title of StrEATs Neighborhood Champion, the fest features cocktail demos with Jenna Reynolds (Duckie) of Hermanita, Kendon Corbett of Chapter 6, Tyler Dacaret of The Crunkleton, Justin Hazelton of Lorem Ipsum, and Sean Teague of Rada. All of this, plus Charlotte's top food trucks and a vendors market featuring a selection of the city's finest culinary vendors.

FANNIE MAE'S HANG SUITE

April 14 • 8 p.m. • The Long Room, 1111 Central Ave. • $20-$70 • djfanniemae.com

Hosted and curated by DJ Fannie Mae, Old School vs New School R&B: A Conversation Across Eras is dedicated to exploring the evolution of the genre — from the classics that raised diehard fans to the sounds that are shaping today. Listeners will move through the vocals, feeling, storytelling, production and intention that defined R&B, from old school soul and timeless ballads of Marvin Gaye and Aretha Franklin to new school textures and sounds. A deep dive into the 10-year anniversary of Rihanna's *ANTI* album will be a linchpin of the conversation. Expect soulful sing-alongs, honest conversation and a fusion of nostalgia and curiosity.



Germôna Sharp (left) stars in Theatre Charlotte's 'Stick Fly' in May 2025. Photo by Kyle J. Britt

NO CEILINGS

Multi-hyphenate talent Germôna Sharp continues to expand on her repertoire

BY PAT MORAN

In one story, a 6-year-old Black boy is suddenly transported into a strange new world that floats above a planet. There he meets his grown-up self, who is lauded as the savior of this future society.

In another, set in the 1950s, a magnetic and ambitious Black singer and dancer prepares for her nightclub act at Manhattan's prestigious Copacabana. Amid stardom, fame, accolades and admirers, she struggles to be true to herself.

These two scenarios, separated by vast stretches of time, space and dimension, are both products of Germôna Sharp's vivid imagination. The Charlotte-based actor, singer and dancer has recently expanded her repertoire with writing and directing projects, showing a willingness to dabble in realism with one story while exploring Afrofuturism with another.

Her futuristic *The Great Maximillian* will receive staged readings during the BOOM Charlotte arts festival in University City in May while the period drama *Runnin' Wild* debuted on March 28 with a dramatized reading at Charlotte Off Broadway's black box theater in Uptown's VAPA Center.

"I want people to see that I did it all — singing, dancing, acting, writing," Sharp says. "It goes very deep for me to be an all-around performer. There's so much that I have that I have to get out."

That's why Sharp remains active as a performer, recently cast in Theatre Charlotte's production of the musical *The Color Purple*, which goes up May 8 at the Queens Road Barn. In that production, Sharp plays the brash and defiant Sofia, who defies male dominance, stands up to racism and inspires the show's protagonist Celie to stand up for herself.

It seems like perfect casting given Sharp's ambition, dedication to her craft and pointed opinions, which sometimes touch on Charlotte's theatre, film and broader performing arts scenes, and how the local landscape can help or hinder up-and-coming artists.

On one hand, Sharp sees plenty of opportunities in Charlotte for performers, producers and directors in theatre and film. She points to the city's vibrant local theatre scene, where actors audition for companies like Three Bone Theatre, Children's Theatre of Charlotte, Theatre Charlotte, and Brand New Sheriff Productions. In addition to local independent films, big TV and film productions like *The Hunting Wives* and 2025's *Roofman* also offer local and regional actors work and networking opportunities.

"There's an ecosystem where everybody is doing kind of the same thing, but in different formats, and trying their best to help each other out the best way they can," says Sharp, who notes that directors and producers who work primarily with one company will freely recommend performers to other companies.

"You're not seeing walls between [companies]." Sharp notes. "It's a community where people say, 'Can I help you out?'"

At the same time, many talented people continue to move to Charlotte.

"They're bringing their talents here to grow in a different soil," Sharp says. "It brings a lot of good and new ideas and … brainstorming."

The down side with such a supportive scene is that it can also devolve into insularity and parochialism, Sharp warns, which results in a scene where producers and directors reuse the same pool of talent.

"They trust this person and know they're going to get it done, but how do they know that they can't trust another person?" Sharp queries. "You gotta try new things out. Theatre is about taking risks."

That's partially why Sharp wrote *Runnin' Wild*. She was met with silence after approaching a few local theatre companies last spring about directing shows, so she created her own opportunity by writing a show she could direct herself.

Runnin' Wild, the first play Sharp has written, is about real-life multi-hyphenate performer Joyce Bryant. The show takes its name from Bryant's 1954 album *Runnin' Wild*. With a four-octave range, bold and boisterous stage presence, glamorous gowns and distinctive short, silver hair, Bryant was "the Beyonce or the Tina Turner of her day," Sharp insists.

Bryant quit performing in 1955 to devote time to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and subsequently became a civil rights activist and vocal instructor.

Sharp's current project, *The Great Maximillian*, jumps centuries into the future to tell a tale designed for a different audience.

"*The Great Maximillian* is a children' s book," Sharp says. "Actually, I'm torn between a play and a book, but it's going on stage as a staged reading."

After being whisked into a world of flying cars and levitating buildings, the story's titular young character encounters people who already know him for the superhero he is to become.

"I want Black children to see themselves in that world as well," continues Sharpe, an avowed lover of science and tech who desires to see Black kids aspire to more than the stereotypical careers of actors or athletes.

'Shut up and learn'

Born in Pittsburgh, Sharp grew up primarily in North Carolina. She became enamored with singing at age 3, joining the chorus in elementary school. Sharp caught the writing bug when she started jotting down journal entries and poetry in middle school. Her interest in acting soon followed. Her first stage role came in a high school production of Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*.

"I wanted to grow beyond high school musicals," Sharp remembers. "I wanted this to be my career."

After returning to Pittsburgh to attend Kaplan Career Institute and Point Park University, Sharp settled briefly in Raleigh before moving to Charlotte in 2022. Once in the Queen City, Sharp acted in a few short films — *A Mendacious Duty* (2024) and *Rise of ReSILiENCE* (2025) — but concentrated on theatre. Her stage credits include *Detroit 67* with Theatre Charlotte, *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* at Matthews Playhouse, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* with Three Bone Theatre, *The Wild Party* with QC Concerts, and *Stick Fly* with Theatre Charlotte, all between 2023-'25.

Actress and singer Trinity Taylor made her debut as assistant director on *Runnin' Wild*. She met Sharp when both were in the cast for *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* at Matthews Playhouse.

"Germôna's honest [and] passionate," Taylor says. "She is always striving for excellence, and I think that she expects that of the people around her as well."

Taylor maintains that Sharp's greatest strength may be her affinity for innovation.

"She's able to create new things from within herself," Taylor says.

Charlotte actor Roman Lawrence met Sharp in 2018, when both were performing in a Raleigh production of *Sister Act*. They reconnected and became friends while performing in *Beautiful* at Matthews Playhouse. In *Runnin' Wild*, Lawrence portrays piano player Eddie, Bryant's confidant as well as accompanist. Lawrence calls Sharp a hardworking director who is knowledgeable about her craft.

"Germôna's also a bit of a perfectionist," Lawrence says. "The work she does is meticulous and to the point."

Sharp says she has three driving forces: "I'm willing to shut up and learn, I'm willing to do the work, and I have confidence in the work."

She knows she needs to challenge herself and not become too comfortable within the Queen City's creative community.

"You have to ask yourself, as an artist, what is your goal?" Sharp says. "Anybody from Charlotte that I've seen on Broadway stages or on national tours, it's because they stepped out of Charlotte. If your goal is to grow, then it really doesn't help you if you're not stepping out."

It's characteristic advice from a bold, multi-talented artist who is prepared to take risks and make her own opportunities. Sharp's work serves notice that it's inevitably necessary for artists to keep moving, whether through striking out for larger markets or stretching talents and tackling challenging projects here.

PMORAN@QCNERVE.COM



Germôna Sharp Photo by Tyree Exum

SOUNDWAVE

CHARLOTTE'S LIVE MUSIC CALENDAR * APR. 1 - APR. 14 *

WEDNESDAY APR. 1

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Mantra w/ Bonfire (Snug Harbor)
Indigo De Souza (The Underground)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Zara Larsson (The Fillmore)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
NC Bluegrass Jam Night (Birdsong Brewing)
Nathan Cox (Evening Muse)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
1300Saint (Neighborhood Theatre)
JAZZ/BLUES
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
COVER BANDS
Petty Rewind (Middle C Jazz)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY APR. 2

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Wastoid w/ Machete, Kenmujo, Squeamish, Syndicate99, Tristinza (The Milestone)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Degs (Cue @ Blackbox Theater)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Mama (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)
JAZZ/BLUES
Pocket Giants (Eighty Eights)
Java Band (Middle C Jazz)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COVER BANDS
'80s Rock Prom (Petra's)

FRIDAY APR. 3

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Wedding Present w/ Mark Robinson (Amos' Southend)
Gooseberry w/ Recess Party, Cassettiquette (Petra's)
Honeyknife w/ Scarhaven, Aurora's Hope (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
Friday Night Vibe (Eighty Eights)
Nicholas Cole (Middle C Jazz)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Jesse Roper w/ Ben Chapman (Neighborhood Theatre)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Rewind: The Ultimate 2000's Rave (Blackbox Theater)
Derrick Carter (The Music Yard)
Club 90s Presents Heated Rivalrave (The Underground)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Songwriter Shuffle (The Rooster)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Bakalao Stars w/ Frank & The Alter Egos (Evening Muse)
EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
Blair w/ Polo Perks, Doris, Phaze Gawd (The Milestone)
COVER BANDS
Crystal Aria w/ Dustin Yager (Goldie's)
Let Love Rule (Lenny Kravitz tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SATURDAY APR. 4

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Demsfightinwords w/ Gimmick, XEighty-SixedX, Lowest Point, Stabbed to Submission (The Milestone)
America (Ovens Auditorium)
Pretty Baby w/ Bravo Pueblo, How Come (Snug Harbor)
Local Odyssey w/ A Day Off (Starlight on 22nd)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Juvenile (The Fillmore)
Lee Fields w/ Monophonics (The Underground)
LATIN/WORLD
Aarohan: Darmiyan (Knight Theater)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
PEEKABOO (Blackbox Theater)
SUNDREAM: Indie Dance Party (The Music Yard)
Ultraviolet Sapphic Dance Party (Petra's)
Beatfreaq (Starlight on 22nd)
JAZZ/BLUES
Buff Dillard (Eighty Eights)
Girls in Gowns (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Mike Faulkenberry Trio (Primal Brewery)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Eric Church w/ Ashley McBryde (Spectrum Center)
EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
A Different Course of Action: DV Survivor Benefit (The Rooster)
COVER BANDS
84 (Van Halen tribute) (Amos' Southend)
Jam Garden w/ Kyle Cummings (Goldie's)

SUNDAY APR. 5

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Camping in Alaska w/ Dead Butterflies, Stella, blankstate., Elder Bright (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Grag Queen w/ Bright Light Bright Light (Evening Muse)
Hazy Sunday (Petra's)
Soul Sunday feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)

MONDAY APR. 6

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
What's Good feat. w/ DJ MF Burns (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Risu (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY APR. 7

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
This Island Earth w/ Field of View, Early Morning, Cold Summer II (The Milestone)
They Are Gutting a Body of Water (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
Luther S. Allison (Eighty Eights)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Moonchild w/ Brittney Carter (Knight Theater)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Cameron Whitcomb (The Fillmore)
John Cowan Trio w/ Luke Bulla, Ethan Ballinger (Neighborhood Theatre)
OPEN MIC
Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
Tosco Music Open Mic (Evening Muse)
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY APR. 8

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Mel Bryant & the Mercy Makers w/ Lacy Dooms (Evening Muse)
Sons of Legion (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Bob Moses w/ Cannons (The Fillmore)
COVER BANDS
Tim Scott Presents Thelonious Monk (Middle C Jazz)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY APR. 9

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Group Therapy w/ The Mad Tea Party; Sigourneys; Hi, I'm Chris (The Milestone)
Phoneboy w/ Heart Attack Man (The Underground)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Mid America w/ Little Hopes (Evening Muse)
Walker Montgomery (Neighborhood Theatre)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Jacoozy w/ Free Whenever (Amos' Southend)
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
CeCe Winans (Ovens Auditorium)
JAZZ/BLUES
Queens Court (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Kai Crowe-Getty w/ Ryan Lockhart, Wes Hamilton (Petra's)

FRIDAY APR. 10

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Jackyl w/ Chris Lafferty (Amos' Southend)
The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
Black Label Society (The Fillmore)
Lowheaven w/ Den of Wolves, .Memoria, Mourning Lotus (The Milestone)
Valley Range w/ Lil Skritt, HNY WLSN (Petra's)
The White Horse w/ 6 Story Pyramid, Color Me Krazy, This Island Earth (The Rooster)
JAZZ/BLUES
Al Strong Quintet (Eighty Eights)
Adam L. McKnight (Middle C Jazz)
Eddie 9V (Neighborhood Theatre)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Cupcakke (The Underground)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Shake the Dust w/ Austin McNeill (Visulite Theatre)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
The Jam Crew (VisArt Video)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Charlotte Symphony: Beethoven's Emperor Concerto (Belk Theater)
John Violinist (Booth Playhouse)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Bolo the DJ (Cue @ Blackbox Theater)
Layla Benitez (The Music Yard)
JVK w/ Willingdon, Scoby, Home For The Day (Snug Harbor)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
The Parks Brothers w/ Bailey Marie (Goldie's)

SATURDAY APR. 11

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Pretoria w/ Moving Boxes (Evening Muse)
Girl Brutal w/ Dirtybutt, Lady Dana, Ashley! (The Rooster)
Ottoman Hogs w/ It's Snakes, Pie Face Girls (Snug Harbor)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Lilly Palmer (Blackbox Theater)
Residency: A Pop Queen Party (Carolina Theatre)
KinAhau (The Music Yard)
Emo Night Brooklyn (Neighborhood Theatre)
2000s Rave (The Underground)
Meredith Parks w/ Tomahawk Baby, Kadey Ballard (Visulite Theatre)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Tosco Music Party (Knight Theater)
Zack Keim w/ David Shane, Ellie K, Nia J (The Milestone)
Gabriel Van (Primal Brewery)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
OOF! (Birdsong Brewing)
MJT w/ Sweet Dream (Evening Muse)
JAZZ/BLUES
Harvey Cummings Experience (Eighty Eights)
Maysa (Middle C Jazz)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Charlotte Symphony: Beethoven's Emperor Concerto (Belk Theater)
EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
The Spring Mix (The Amp Ballantyne)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Nate Smith w/ Josh Ross, Just Jayne (Coyote Joe's)
Diamond Dixie w/ Simple Sole (Goldie's)
Sinners & Saints w/ The Montvales, Blue Cactus (Petra's)
LATIN/K-POP/WORLD
Blessd (The Fillmore)
COVER BANDS
Ride the Lightning (Metallica tribute) w/ Shotguns N Roses (Amos' Southend)

SUNDAY APR. 12

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Braymores w/ Echo Plum (Evening Muse)
Swae w/ Rothschild, Juniper, Mojarra, Slugline (The Milestone)
The Queers w/ Good Good Grief (The Rooster)
JAZZ/BLUES
Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Cardi B (Spectrum Center)
CHRISTIAN/GOSPEL/RELIGIOUS
Rare of Breed (Neighborhood Theatre)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Jack Lawrence & Patrick Crouch (Free Range Brewing)
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COVER BANDS
Debbie Rider (Linda Ronstadt tribute) (Booth Playhouse)
William Green plays George Duke (Middle C Jazz)
Cosmic Charlie (Grateful Dead tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

MONDAY APR. 13

JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
LATIN/K-Pop/WORLD
Feid vs. Ferxxo (The Fillmore)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

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Tracei performs at an album release party at Prism on March 28. Photo by Quincy P.

THE LOVE BELOW

Tracei's debut album 'MOOD' seeks romance and self-love

BY TYLER BUNZEY

Every time we pick up our phones these days, we're met with scenes of war, bloodshed and destruction, with all signs pointing to escalation. The anxiety is present when we fill our cars with gas and our bellies with food, the sting of bloated costs never far from our minds.

It can feel like the world is ending in ways both spectacular and banal. In the midst of these apparent end times, romantic love can feel like an abstraction — a commodity out of pace with the political urgencies that permeate our days.

If romance feels like a luxury at the end of the world, Charlotte-based singer Tracei's debut album shows us that love is not a commodity but a vital necessity. The 27-year-old musician explores the vitalities of Black queer love specifically in her first full-length project, *MOOD*.

Released in February with a celebration at Prism Social on March 28, the 11-song album explores the peaks and troughs of a developing relationship over 29 minutes, beginning with the intestinal gymnastics concomitant with falling for someone followed by the lust, infatuation, distrust and vulnerability that comes with handing one's self over to amorous chaos.

For Tracei, the project came together as a metaphor, tracing her own journey of stepping into her truth as a creative and a person.

"I go where the love is shown, because I'm going to show love regardless," she told Queen City Nerve. "And if we teach something based off of love, we've got to actually live by it."

Growing up in Florida — first in Gainesville then Boca Raton — Tracey Kemp's early musical training came from her time in the church. Like so many Southern Black musicians, the church was a fecund musical field in which to plant the seeds of her creativity, providing the opportunity to experiment with percussion, keyboard, and eventually her voice.

Her time in the church laid the tracks for Tracei's creative journey. On one hand, the church provided a sonic foundation for her that's apparent in the layered vocals and choral samples featured on songs like "anxious/let go" and "me & you."

On the other hand, it introduced her to the hypocrisy of the broader church, which simultaneously accepted LGBTQ+ talent in the choir space while rejecting the lifestyle of the people wielding that talent.

As a masculine-presenting, Black, queer woman, she explained the impact that this space had on her artistic development.

"We're people. We want people to understand us, but sometimes it's hard that we don't talk about how hard it is to truly walk in your skin," Tracei said. "And I think for me, I just try to embody that everywhere I go. I'm going to be who I am truly, fully, whether you get it or not."

Through her experience in the church, Tracei learned to start to explore what it meant to love herself. She quickly learned, as the first line in her Instagram profile declares, that she is "unable to fit in a box."

Florida most certainly couldn't contain her. While she was still incubating her creative career, Tracei's love of basketball brought her to North Carolina. She played first at Gaston County's Belmont Abbey College, keeping one foot in the church, before embarking for Wilmington's Cape Fear Community College then arriving at Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU).

After graduating from JCSU in 2023 with a degree in social work, Tracei was involved in a bad car accident. The experience inspired her to think seriously about becoming an artist.

"I realized I spent my entire life, like, I did everything I was asked. I was a first-generational college graduate. I have two degrees. I left my hometown. I've done everything that was asked of me from my family. And I got to a place where I was like, 'What do you want to do? Like, what does Tracei want?'" she recalled.

A serendipitous run-in with Charlotte-based Dreamville rapper Lute at OldNews Vintage spurred Tracei to return to one of her first loves: music.

After listening to her first demo, Lute encouraged her to lean into her gift. She quickly met Charlotte touchstone emcees like MAVI and DEVN, the latter of whom featured on her 2024 track "come over."

She released a series of singles between 2023 and 2024, the first of which, "face," brought her to major festivals like Dreamville and SXSW.

The newly released body of work that follows these singles, *MOOD* features an impressive cohesion that belies the brief three years she has spent writing songs.

In collaboration with DaRemen J. and Dream Studios, Tracei rolled out the album through a series of five self-directed short films on Instagram featuring five alter egos. The five personalities — Storm, Butterfly, Swag, Lovergirl, and Crash — represent her personality's constituents.

Butterfly, for example, represents the "overthinker" in Tracei, who struggles to accept her own beauty. Unsurprisingly, Swag is Tracei at her most confident — charming, unfiltered and present. Storm represents her introversion, calmness covering a caution that protects her heart from harm. These alter egos melt into the mélange of feelings that tempestuously swirl through her as she falls in and out of love.

Swag's self-confidence is in full effect on tracks like "pglt" ("pretty girls love Tracei") and "lick," but the charged sapphic eroticism of the latter is cut with Butterfly's self-doubt as she intones, "*I'm so anxious, so anxious…*" while the track fades out.

The fleshly delight of the album's beginning leads into a stabilizing flame as Tracei falls deeper for her partner in tracks like "present" and "ijwlu (I just wanna love you)." But by "merry go round" and "can we be fr," cracks start to form.

Lovergirl's vulnerability clashes with the fiery self-righteousness of Crash, her defensive character. In "can we be fr," she sings, "Can we be for real, can you make it crystal clear now for me," in a pleading tone before abruptly shifting into chastisement. "*This is not you talking/ It's those goddamn friends*," she chides.

By the time we arrive at the penultimate track, "a mess," it seems as though Tracei's love is about to fall apart. Laced with a saxophone feature from Bryan Patterson, Jr., she reflects, "*I'm the problem/ and I blame myself/ Can't blame no one else…*"

She finds her resolve again on the final track, "step 4 u," in which she gathers her best parts to step into her complete self. There's a vulnerability in this final plea, giving her the opportunity to lay it on the table.

She knows who she is and she offers that complete self to the lover she's been courting throughout the album.

For Tracei, the process of making *MOOD* led her to a deeper love for herself.

"The end of that record, I wrote that to myself, but it's written as if it's written to someone that I love," she said. "As the project continued to develop, I learned a sense of self in that and understanding how to embody all these parts of me, even the insecure parts."

The imperative of *MOOD*, then, is one that queer people have always had to explore, all the more as we look for love at the end of the world.

Tracei's remarkable debut is a reminder of the simple but poignant reflection of queer studies scholar GerShun Avilez in his book *Black Queer Freedom*: "Sometimes, a simple kiss can make one feel freed for a moment."

MOOD is an imperative for queer people to learn to love themselves even as guarantees of safety and stability melt away, if they were ever extended to us in the first place. The album tells us that Black queer love is loving oneself through, rather than in spite of, the chaos of catastrophe, including the thrill of the erotic, the emptiness of heartbreak and the loneliness of self-doubt.

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Pouring up at the March 28 release party. Photo by Quincy P.



Beyond Amazing Donuts' six staple flavors on display. Photo courtesy of B.A.D.

STANDING STRONG

Jasmine Macon remains resilient to keep Beyond Amazing Donuts thriving

BY RYAN PITKIN

"Beware the ides of March." It's an expression inspired by the assassination of Julius Caesar to forewarn of an impending tragedy or collapse. But for Jasmine Macon, it's the whole month of March that causes the problems.

And there will be no collapse.

Despite being forced out of her Montford storefront in March 2025, followed by another displacement from her commissary kitchen space due to fire in March 2026, Macon's Beyond Amazing Donuts strives on.

Moving into April, Macon has found a new home at the Carolina Commercial Kitchen in east Charlotte, a space from which she'll continue creating inventive pastry offerings to be sold at farmers markets and pop-ups around the city this spring.

In June, she'll join the grand opening of Sparkhouse Coffee, the new venture from Do Greater Charlotte, a nonprofit founded by William McNeely to empower young creatives in the Queen City.

Macon plans to have a presence in Sparkhouse's Uptown space, selling doughnuts there on weekdays while continuing to show up to markets on the weekends.

The opening of Sparkhouse will mark Beyond Amazing's first storefront since having to shut down the Montford spot in 2025. Uptown customers can get a taste of her specialty doughnuts during a Sparkhouse preview on Trade Street from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. on April 11.

She's also scheduled to host a Bloom and Beyond pop-up at La Bodeguita in Camp North End on April 4, where she'll offer up three spring menu items inspired by freshness and renewal: raspberry lemon, blueberry oat crumble, and a classic cinnamon roll.

Macon said her sense of resilience comes from her father, who in his sixties still owns a martial arts studio in Maryland.

"For all my life, I've seen my dad take his passion, take what he really cares about, and turn it into a business," she said. "Not just a business, but something that gives to his community, something that I very openly see him enjoy."

She's taken her father's example running an American Kenpo studio and applied it to her pastries.

"Not that my dad is always profitable, but he's always committed to doing this thing that he loves, and his business has changed so many times over the years, but he just kept to it regardless of how big or small it has been," she continued.

"I think that taught me a lot about hard work, a lot about resilience, a lot about how, if your dream changes, it's fine. There is no one set rule or accomplishment or anything that can define what you're doing for yourself and what you love, as long as you just keep moving forward and believing that everything is going to work out."

It started with an Easy Bake Oven

Macon's story didn't start in the way one might expect.

"A lot of people, especially a lot of Southern people, they talk about how their mom or their grandma or someone had this gift and they could really cook and, you know, maybe there were recipes passed down. That's not really my story," she explained with a laugh.

Macon was raised by her grandmother in Thomasville, a small town south of the Triad area, when her military mother was stationed in South Korea. Living alongside her two sisters, Macon said she always had the biggest appetite, so her grandma bought her an Easy-Bake Oven just to get her out of the way.

"I was the one constantly eating, always in the refrigerator, always in the cabinets, and it just got to a point where my grandma was like, 'Alright, child, I'm tired of cooking for you. You're going to get in here and learn how to make stuff on your own.'"

She started with multiple Easy-Bake Ovens before she was eventually allowed to experiment in the kitchen with her grandmother's supervision. After learning the ropes with Toll House cookies and boxes of Betty Crocker's baked goods, she began watching Food Network and putting recipes together from scratch.

She continued to explore recipes throughout her childhood, but it wasn't until her senior year at Thomasville High School that she began to consider a career in the culinary arts.

She remembers a student from Johnson & Wales University (JWU) in Charlotte visited her class to do a demonstration, teaching Macon and her classmates how to make an apple crisp. Macon was immediately inspired.

"She was a young Black lady, so I was really excited to see her specifically because I was like, 'Oh my gosh, there's a Black woman coming from a culinary institute.' So I was super stoked."

Macon grilled the guest with questions about her experience at JWU and became "enamored" by what she shared about her experience. By the time she left school that day, Macon had made up her mind to attend Johnson and Wales' Charlotte campus.

Though she had experience cooking a wide variety of recipes throughout her childhood, a passing comment from the visiting student at Thomasville High helped steer her to focus on pastries.

"When I met that young lady, she had mentioned a meat-cutting class, and I was like, 'Ew, I don't want to do that. I don't want to be in a class in a cooler and we have to chop up all of these random animals. I just cannot do that,'" she recalled. "So I was like, well, going back to my fondness for cakes and cookies and things, I can just do baking and pastry and maybe that'll work out."

Since then, things have worked out, but not without struggle.

From a doughnut truck to a star-studded kitchen

Macon's first job in the pastry space was as the first employee of Sugar Donuts, the first doughnut-focused food truck in the city. She helped the owner develop the menu and the recipes.

It was through that experience that the earliest ideas for Beyond Amazing Donuts were born.

"I was like, 'Oh, this is it for me. Like, I love doing this,'" she recalled. "I loved the process. I loved going back into my notes from school and kind of figuring out how to tweak the dough. And I just knew during that experience that I wanted to do it for myself."

She continued to develop her skills through a stint with Joe's Doughs, where she was given more freedom to experiment with flavors. Then in March 2020, she landed a job as the pastry chef at Leah & Louise, Chef Greg Collier's anticipated new restaurant inside Camp North End.

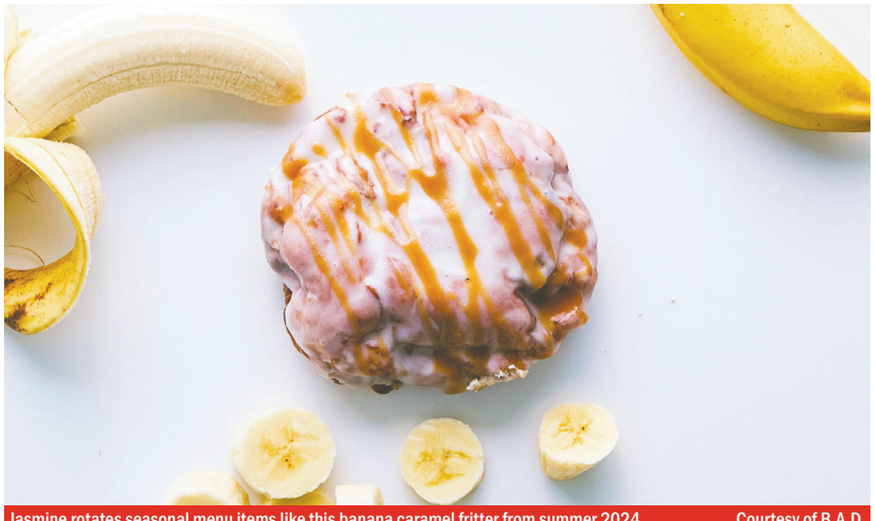
Days after a soft opening that saw food writers and influencers raving about the menu, on March 17, COVID-19 restrictions forced the restaurant to close before it could actually open.

Beware the ides of March...

Leah & Louise pivoted to carryout. Macon was tasked with creating a pastry box for curbside customers.

"Every month for a while, I offered a pastry box and I took that opportunity to continue to practice my recipe," she said. "Like, I would do one doughnut, a couple of cookies, maybe a slice of cake and whatever other confection, but I always made sure to do a doughnut."

In a kitchen that included the James Beard-nominated Collier, Justin Hazelton (now owner of Lorem Ipsum) as bar manager, Tchnavia "Tché" Carter (Community Matters Cafe) as sous chef, and



Jasmine rotates seasonal menu items like this banana caramel fritter from summer 2024. Courtesy of B.A.D.

Oscar Johnson (co-founder of Jimmy Pearls), the pressure was on to create at a higher level.

"It was challenging," Macon said of her time there, "but I think it was the challenge I needed to kind of expand my own skill set, because people think, like, 'Oh, doughnuts are so easy.' But I think that my doughnuts are kind of unique in the sense that I don't just stick with traditional flavors."

Collier said Macon was a critical part of building the original program at the acclaimed restaurant.

"A lot of times I would come with ideas and concepts, and Jasmine had the ability to translate those ideas into recipes and finished products that made sense. She helped shape that early pastry identity in a real way," Collier told Queen City Nerve.

"At the same time, she was very clear early on that she wanted to do her own doughnut concept," he continued. "We started supporting that through pop-ups at Leah & Louise and every time we did them, people responded. They sold out, and what stood out was that she was bringing more thought, more technique and more creativity to the flavors of doughnuts."



Jasmine Macon, founder of Beyond Amazing Donuts. Photo courtesy of B.A.D.

Some of Macon's creations from Leah & Louise, such as the Black Garlic Everything Donut, remain staples at Beyond Amazing Donuts today.

Beyond Amazing on her own

About a year and a half into her time at Leah & Louise, Macon began doing pop-ups on the side, selling doughnuts at HEX Coffee on Saturdays with Collier's blessing.

Throughout that time, she regularly solicited feedback from customers, not only on favorite flavors but on their willingness to support a standalone business if she were to launch one. The response was always positive, which led to her opening her first storefront in summer 2023.

Though she was forced to shut the doors there two years later when production numbers didn't match the projections, her products have remained a hit at farmers markets in Uptown, South End, University City and Matthews, where she regularly sets up.

While creating a new menu each month, Macon always keeps six staples on the menu: raspberry sprinkle, brown butter with sorghum caramel, the Black Garlic Everything, vanilla, the Old Fashion (glazed sour cream cake), and chocolate caramel cookie.

Working on Collier's suggestion, the Black Garlic Everything was created in partnership with Johnson, who continues to supply the furikake topping.

The brown butter with sorghum caramel flavor is an ode to Macon's grandmother, who enjoyed butter and molasses smeared on white bread as her favorite snack. It remains the top-selling item at Beyond Amazing Donuts.

Along with the April 4 pop-up at La Bodeguita, Macon is also offering an Easter box of four flavors designed to capture the warmth and indulgence of spring: carrot cake roll, key lime pie, raspberry lemon, and blueberry oat crumble.

Though preorders ended on March 31, Macon said there could be extras on the morning of the pick-up, at Enderly Coffee on Tuckaseegee Road on Easter Sunday from 9-11 a.m.

Beyond that, she's focused on joining Sparkhouse Coffee for its grand opening on Juneteenth weekend. We spoke to her shortly after touring the facility for the first time in March and she was excited about how it will turn out.

"It's going to be amazing," she said of the project. "It's a lot bigger than I thought it was, so I'm excited to see the events and how it's activated."

There's another partnership she will be announcing soon that promises to make 2026 an even bigger year for Beyond Amazing Donuts, proving that Macon's resilience will pay off as she continues to cultivate a loyal following of doughnut lovers by simply doing the thing she loves most.

And with that pesky month of March out of the way, it's all downhill from here.

Follow Beyond Amazing Donuts on Instagram at @b.a.donuts.clt for updates on pop-ups, farmers markets and other news about the business.

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SHOW OFF YOUR CHARLOTTE YARD

Got a backyard you're proud of?

We're putting together a special Backyard Inspiration photo spread for our **Charlotte Outdoor Living Guide** and we want to feature real local yards — not stock photos.

We're looking for the spaces you actually live in and love:
lush gardens, cozy patios, killer grilling setups, kid-friendly backyards, fire-pit hangouts, porch jungles, and everything in between. If it's beautiful, creative, welcoming, or just the best spot to host your people, we want to see it.

How to enter:

- Snap a few photos of your outdoor space.
- Email them to info@qcnerve.com with the subject line "My Backyard."
- Optional: add 2–3 sentences about what inspired your outdoor space or what you love most about it.

Selected yards will be featured in our upcoming **Charlotte Summer Outdoor Living Guide** in print and online.

HOROSCOPE

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APRIL 1 - APRIL 7

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) You are self-reliant and rarely ask anyone for help. But this time, you might want someone you trust to be there for you while you deal with a difficult matter. Cheer up! Things will improve soon.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) Your patience begins to pay off. Look for the first sign that your goals are in plain sight. Then take time out from all your hard work for some fun with someone special.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) There could be some lingering effects from a recent setback. But it's all for the best (as you're now beginning to appreciate). Use the lessons that you've learned to start over.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) What seemed to be a difficult goal to reach is now — or soon will be — all yours. Congratulations! Meanwhile, an unexpected travel opportunity holds an intriguing new prospect.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) A chilly reception to your presentation shouldn't cause you to abandon your ideas. Instead, tweak up the weaker parts and then, once again, show them what you have.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) Hiding your feelings might make you feel safer against rejection. But this could be the time when you'll need to speak up or risk losing out on an important event in your life.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Some co-workers might try to talk you out of accepting a promotion, but you need to follow your own instincts. And if you believe you're right for the job, then take the chance.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Some changes are in order as you come to realize that you need to sort out several areas in your life. Your remarkable insight helps you make the right decisions.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) It's time to act on your own behalf and separate yourself from people whose selfish needs threaten your personal and/or professional survival.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Resist the tendency to close yourself off from unpleasant situations. Instead, open up to how things are so that you can help change them to what they could be.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) An unspoken problem could be driving a deep wedge between you and a special person. Some honest talking 'twixt the two of you can start the healing process.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) You might feel like you've been going around in ever-widening circles when trying to deal with recent workplace problems. Cheer up! A successful end is finally in sight.

BORN THIS WEEK: You love to talk, and people love to hear what you have to say. If you were a teacher, you'd never have to worry about keeping your students' attention.

APRIL 8 - APRIL 14

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Changes in the workplace might be daunting for some, but you love challenges and will do just fine with this one. Remember to work with facts, not rumors.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) Just when you need some emotional reassurances, an almost-forgotten friendly gesture gets repaid in the most wonderful way. More good news follows!

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) You have a chance to restart a stalled personal relationship. Meanwhile, a workplace change bodes well for new opportunities, but you need more facts before you can act.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Talk to your longtime friends about why they're not in sync with your new pal. You might learn some startling facts. Additionally, a difficult workplace situation eases.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) What seems to be a golden opportunity is naturally attractive to Leos, but be careful that it's not just a lot of surface glitter. You need to ask more questions.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) There are still some problems with getting decisions made on your workplace project. Talk to a supervisor about possible ways to break the impasse.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) A family matter could become more complicated and reach an apparent dead end. Don't give up on trying to find a solution. Work patiently with everyone involved.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) You'll soon hear more about an offer that could change the direction of your career. Meanwhile, enjoy the newly positive on-the-job environment.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Expect a favorable reply to a workplace request. On the home front, a full explanation helps you sort out a long-standing personal problem.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) A serious matter needs focused consideration. Watch that your sometimes-capricious nature doesn't create any unnecessary distractions.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) You win added support for your determination to turn a bad situation into a good one. One new ally arrives from a most unexpected source.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Family and friends need to be told about a decision that you're about to make. Be prepared to offer a full explanation when asked. Hold nothing back.

BORN THIS WEEK: You can be a fighter and a lover. You are a natural leader with a strong, no-nonsense sense of justice that makes people respect you.

GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

	+		+		= 14
+		+		-	
	+		-		= 8
+		÷		×	
	+		+		= 17
= 14		= 1		= 10	

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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Even Exchange

by Donna Pettman

Each numbered row contains two clues and two 6-letter answers. The two answers differ from each other by only one letter, which has already been inserted. For example, if you exchange the A from MASTER for an I, you get MISTER. Do not change the order of the letters.

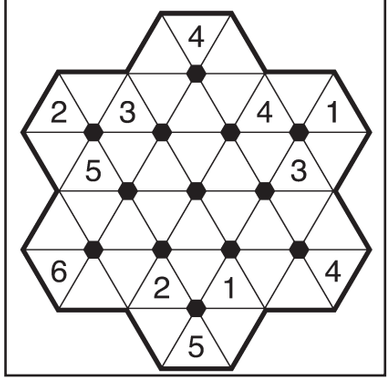
1. Curly-haired dog	P _ _ _ _ _	Pasta segment	N _ _ _ _ _
2. 39th President	C _ _ _ _ _	Negotiate a trade	B _ _ _ _ _
3. Dish	_ _ _ T _	Location	_ _ _ C _
4. Group of sheep	_ L _ _ _	Fancy dress	_ R _ _ _
5. Wilt	W _ _ _ _ _	Or's partner	E _ _ _ _ _
6. Large book	_ _ V _ _	Peace prize giver	_ _ B _ _
7. Skimpy beachwear	_ _ _ _ _ I	Using a two-wheeler	_ _ _ _ _ G
8. Egypt's capital	_ _ _ _ O	Toto's kind of terrier	_ _ _ _ N
9. Backbone	_ _ _ N _	Railroad stake	_ _ _ K _
10. Modest and retiring	_ _ M _ _ _	Space telescope	_ _ B _ _ _

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SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR
is **LONGFELLOW**

One letter stands for another. In this sample, **A** is used for the three L's, **X** for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each week the code letters are different.

FML PANUSGLT VXL DKOI;
RJNVVNUM PANUSGLT VXL
TKJG.
— OKJMGFT HFWFAVXJA

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: **A** equals **B**

SR BNJ LWBZVK LRRUJWX,
KBSUUJV LDT XSDPKUJC LVJ
LUU PZZT AFTTSJK, S
KFMMZKJ BNJC'VJ AJD MLUK.

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TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. TELEVISION: What is Ron Swanson's favorite food group in the sitcom "Parks and Recreation"?
2. GAMES: In Scrabble, how many tiles does each player get to start?
3. GEOGRAPHY: Dubai is in which Middle Eastern country?
4. MOVIES: What is Neo's real name in "The Matrix"?
5. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president was born with the name Leslie Lynch King Jr.?
6. LITERATURE: Which 19th-century English novel introduces the character Mr. Rochester?
7. FOOD & DRINK: Cornelius Rooster is the mascot of which cereal brand?
8. SCIENCE: What is the process called when water evaporates from plants?
9. CHEMISTRY: What is the most abundant metal in Earth's crust?
10. ANATOMY: How many vertebrae are in the human spine?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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		7					2	4
						9	8	
8	4	9	2	1	5	3		7
5		4	7					8
9	6	8		2				
	9			8	2	4		5
	2	5		7	3	8	1	9
3			4				7	2

PLACE A NUMBER IN THE EMPTY BOXES IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH ROW ACROSS, EACH COLUMN DOWN AND EACH SMALL 9-BOX SQUARE CONTAINS ALL OF THE NUMBERS ONE TO NINE.

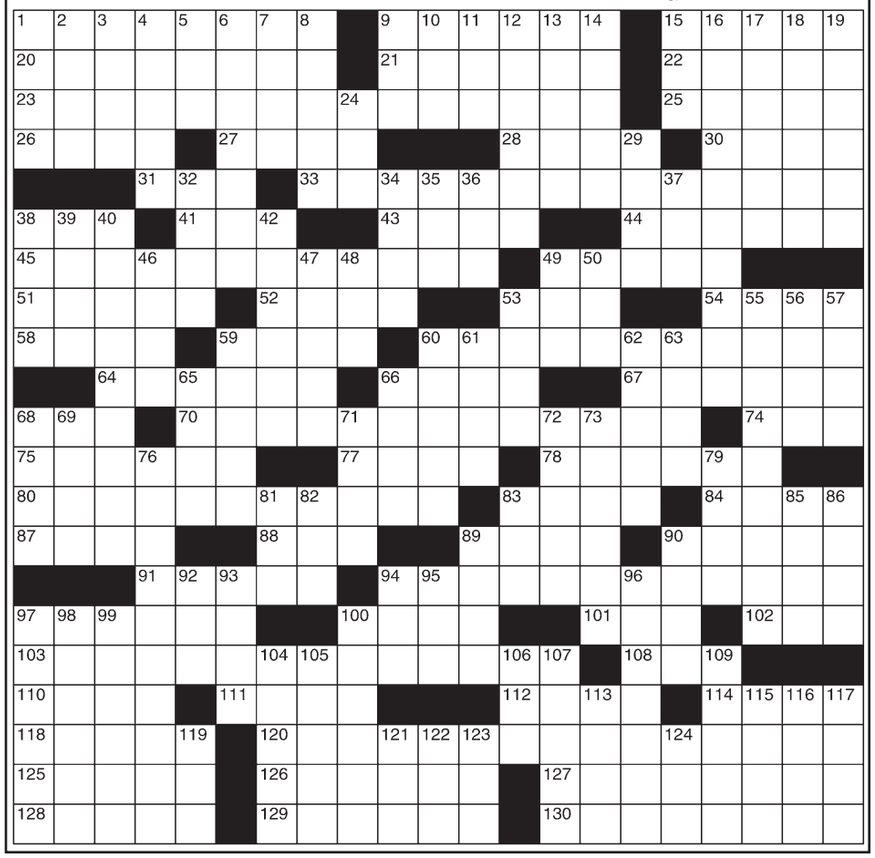


CROSSWORD
LANGUAGE GROUP

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ACROSS
1 Knee, elbow or shoulder problem
9 Pop's Easton
15 Koranic faith
20 Make hostile
21 "Omoo" writer Melville
22 Cheese, in Chihuahua
23 Instruments such as maracas and congas
25 Slow-moving mollusk
26 "Little" girl in "Hairspray"
27 Comment just after waking
28 Certain Fed
30 "Nuts!"
31 Angsty rock subgenre
33 Loose-skinned citrus fruit
38 Upper-left PC key
41 Anxious condition, for short
43 Tranquillity
44 City in Ohio
45 Famed ethnic fighters
49 Uncool character
51 Big melees
52 Pop's Celine
53 See 130-Across
54 Gas brand in Canada
58 Speller's clarifying words
59 Mrs., in Essen
60 Rembrandt, Vermeer or Hals
64 Hush-hush
66 Horse father
67 Like galaxies
68 "Well now!"
70 Alternative to Kool-Aid or Hi-C
74 One or more
75 Israelites' Promised Land
77 Makes illegal
78 To a great degree
80 The Bollywood film industry
83 "Ask — questions ..."
84 Self-motivation mantra
87 Snow vehicle
88 Bumped into
89 "Je t'—" ("I love you," in Paris)
90 Tranquillity
91 Skip off to the altar
94 Adar, Nisan and Tishri
97 Flax-colored
100 Precious
101 Pine- — (disinfectant)
102 Match unit
103 5 and 10, but not V and X
108 Rejections
110 Short note
111 Bandleader Arnaz
112 LAX listings
114 Gp. for people 50 and up
118 Intermingle
120 Apt directive for solvers of this puzzle
125 Debate topic
126 "Pata Pata" singer Makeba
127 Frat party dispensers
128 Make fun of
129 Mystery
130 With 53-Across, section of the northern Atlantic

DOWN
1 Indonesian island
2 Mongolia's — Bator
3 Baptism or matrimony
4 Expropriate
5 Rustic hotel
6 Pudding thickener
7 Bullet point
8 Blood fluid
9 Mu — shrimp
10 "— So Fine"
11 Lifesaving sites, in brief
12 Political exile
13 2020 U.S. Open winner Osaka
14 Former U.N. chief Kofi
15 Mensa stats
16 Most fancy duds
17 Found out, to Brits
18 Italian cheese
19 Liquefied by heat
24 IRS hiree
29 Central point
32 Cuts, as a lawn
34 Sign gas
35 — es Salaam, Tanzania
36 Pack-carrying equine
37 Actress Issa or Charlotte
38 Blogger Klein
39 "Je —" ("I am," in Paris)
40 Decorative enamelware
42 "Celebrity Rehab" host
46 — Reader (magazine)
47 Rodeo lasso
48 Debt note
49 Jan. preceder
50 Infant's cry
53 Stair part
55 Lost tabbies
56 Oscar winner Penn
57 Paris airport
59 Swiss money
60 Entertainer Ross or Rigg
61 Banquet liquid holders
62 PC shortcut
63 Tennis' Arthur
65 Indian tea
66 Old Thailand
68 Folkie Phil
69 Hard rain
71 "Likely story!"
72 "I volunteer!"
73 "I haven't gotten word yet"
76 Extra benefit
79 Legal claim on property
81 Little demon
82 Originally named
83 Former space station
85 Nagging pain
86 Bird's refuge
89 "— -Ca-Dabra" (1974 hit song)
90 Sport played on horseback
92 Maui gift
93 Like much music of the '90s
94 Bit of a giggle
95 Corn serving
96 Godzilla or Grendel
97 Stratagem
98 Ultimatum ending
99 City near San Diego
100 Mendeleev who created the periodic table
104 Self-description after a lifestyle change
105 Runner Bolt
106 Zodiac lion
107 Ticket ends
109 Decaf brand
113 General site
115 A long time
116 Floor decor
117 Mexican money
119 Inferior grade
121 Smoked thing, for short
122 Omelet meat
123 Sumac of song
124 Assoc.



NERVE ENDINGS

A COMPLEX LEGACY

On César Chavez Day, encouraging the whole truth

BY ILIANA SANTILLÁN

A decade ago, when I was teaching fourth grade in Apex, North Carolina, my students were preparing for a wax museum project. Each of them had to choose a historical figure, research their life, and then "become" that person for a day.

I remember reviewing the list of approved figures and feeling something was missing.

There were no Latino names. So I added them.

I added César Chavez. I added Dolores Huerta. I added Sonia Sotomayor.

And I remember how my students reacted — especially to Chavez. They lit up.

Chavez organized farmworkers in the early 1960s, helping migrant farmworkers ensure they had access to water to drink, protection from pesticides and weren't forced to work in unsafe conditions. When he died in 1993, he was considered a folk hero.

My kids got it; they enthusiastically talked about the strikes, about organizing farmworkers, about someone who looked like their families standing up and winning. For many of them, it was the first time they saw a Latino leader framed as a hero in their curriculum.

I'll never forget one of my students asking me, "Miss, is he really Mexican?"

That question stayed with me because it said everything about what our kids are used to: not seeing themselves in history, questioning whether they belong in it, whether they can lead, whether they can shape anything at all.

And in that moment, I felt proud. Proud that I had expanded the story. Proud that my students could see themselves in someone like Chavez, in someone like Huerta, in the power of "Sí, se puede" (Yes, it can be done).

But what I didn't fully understand then — and what I cannot ignore now with the revelations that Chavez abused women and girls — is how incomplete that lesson was. March 31 marked César Chavez Day, a federal commemorative holiday. In the wake of allegations published in the New York Times about Chavez's abuse of women and girls, it is more important than ever to consider what his true legacy means.

It wasn't just that certain names were missing from my list. It's that we were taught to put men on a pedestal — and to make women take the back seat.

Across movements, across history, across the stories we tell in classrooms and communities, it is men who are elevated. Even when there are questions about their character, their behavior or the harm they caused, we are taught to focus on their achievements, to contextualize their actions, to forgive what would never be forgiven in women.

We are taught to admire first and question later — if at all.

Violence against women is not an anomaly. It is an epidemic that cuts across race, class and geography. And still, when it is found out, it is minimized. Questioned. Dismissed. And ultimately normalized.

In my own life, I think about the women around me — cousins, aunts, nieces. Stories that were never fully spoken but always understood. The kind of silence that isn't empty — it's heavy. It shapes what we accept, what we excuse, what we learn to live with.

And it raises a question I can't ignore anymore: What do we do with what we know now?

Because I think about that classroom often. About those students who saw themselves in history for the first time. And I ask myself, what would I do differently today?

How do I still teach them to believe in their power, in their ability to lead and build and change the world? I would not ask them to ignore the full truth.

Because we should not have to choose between pride and honesty. We can hold both.

We can acknowledge the impact of Chavez, the organizing, the movement-building, the doors that were opened for farmworkers and Latinos in general. And we can also name what has been overlooked, what has been silenced, and who carried the weight of that silence.

We can say clearly: women were there. Women led. Women endured.

Women like Dolores Huerta, who worked alongside Chavez and we know now was abused by him.

And women whose names we may never know.

We cannot keep normalizing violence against women — not in our homes, not in our communities, not in our movements. We cannot keep building narratives that celebrate progress while ignoring the harm that made it possible. And we cannot ask the next generation to inherit that silence.

If there is anything I know for sure, it is this: Telling our stories matters.

Every time we speak, something shifts. Someone else recognizes themselves. Someone else feels less alone. That is how change begins.

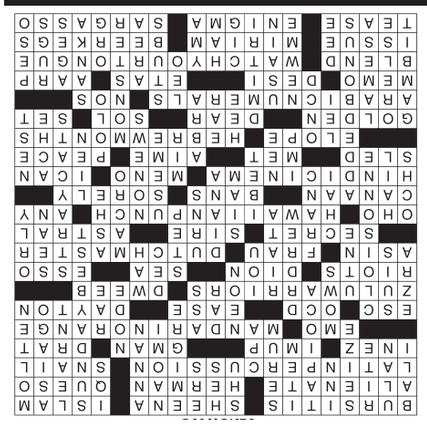
So my commitment is simple: to keep creating space and telling our stories.

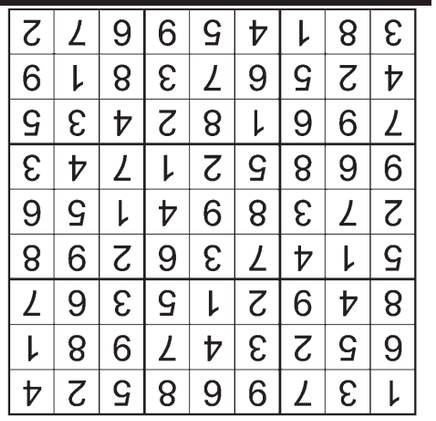
In our hands, women have the responsibility and the opportunity to shape our collective future.

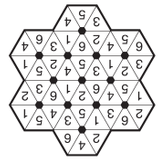
Iliana Santillán is a Mexican immigrant, educator, advocate and mom leading the charge for Latino power in North Carolina. She is the co-host of El Faro, Beacon Media's Latino media arm.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS







Trivia Answers

1. Meat.
2. Seven.
3. United Arab Emirates.
4. Thomas Anderson.
5. Gerald Ford
6. "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë.
7. Kellogg's Corn Flakes.
8. Transpiration.
9. Aluminum.
10. 33.

CryptoQuote

answer

Age wrinkles the body; quitting wrinkles the soul.
— Douglas MacArthur

CryptoQuip

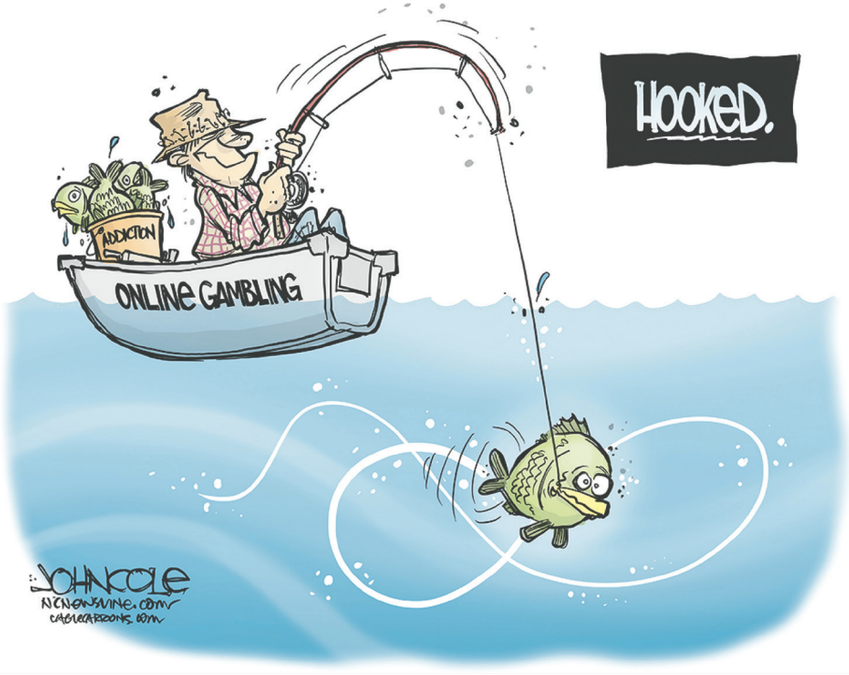
answer

If the actors Affleck, Stiller and Kingsley are all good buddies, I suppose they're Ben pals.

Even Exchange

answers

1. Poodle, Noodle
2. Carter, Barter
3. Plate, Place
4. Flock, Frock
5. Writer, Either
6. Novel, Nobel
7. Bikini, Biking
8. Cairo, Cairn
9. Spine, Spike
10. Humble, Hubble



"Setting the Hook" by John Cole via NC Newsline

SAVAGE LOVE QUICKIES

Suck it up

BY DAN SAVAGE

Which brand makes the best glass dildos? Asking for a friend!

"Glass toys are not only gorgeous but also provide an amazing experience thanks to their weight, smooth surface, temperature-play options and compatibility with any kind of lubricant," said Jeneen Doumitt, the owner of SheBop, a Portland-based sex toy shop. "One of our favorite brands is Crystal Delights, a small glass-toy maker based in Washington that offers a wide array of products at various price points. Best known for their butt plugs, they also have dildo options such as the Galaxy Curve. For more options and reasons why glass is a fantastic choice, check out our blog post here: She Bop's Guide to Glass Toys!"

You can follow SheBop on Instagram @ SheBopTheShop and shop for toys on their website or at one of their two silicone-dick-and-mortar locations in Portland.

My on again/off again ex of many years was recently widowed. We had our difficulties, but we also had some great sex. I was thinking of making one more run at her. What would be a considerate time to wait before approaching her?

Judging from a recent question from a recently widowed caller and some helpful feedback from two women who'd recently lost their husbands, widows' fire — "a disorienting, intense, and unwelcome surge of sexual desire occurring after partner loss," according to the Association for Death Education and Counseling — kicks in at about six months. I would suggest sending your condolences at least two months before sending a "Hey, you up?" text. (And, yes, there's a dating app for widows and widowers.)

My wife of 16 years has begun to lose interest in sex in a big way. We are on completely different wavelengths regarding the frequency of sex and the variety of sex. (Particularly pegging.) How do I remain in this marriage when I feel that a huge part of me is being neglected?

Before the commenters jump in: Are you doing something wrong? Are you doing everything wrong? Are you neglecting your personal hygiene? Are you doing your fair share of the household labor? And when you do have sex — which isn't as often or as varied as you would like — is your wife getting off? (You only mention one sex act — pegging — and while many women enjoy pegging their male partners, none of your wife's nerve endings are located in a dildo.) If you're doing everything right and the sex is infrequent and unfulfilling, you have four options: ask for permission to get it elsewhere, cheat and get it elsewhere, leave in the hopes of getting it elsewhere, or stay and suck it up.

How do you find a third for a threesome?

If you're a gay couple, you can go to a bar or bathhouse or create a joint couples account on Threads or Instagram and wait for one of the "normalize monogamy in the gay community" boys to slide into your DMs. If you're a straight couple, you can get on a hookup app like Feeld or 3Fun or #Open.

Your thoughts on 44-year age gaps?

I will not tolerate any hate being directed at Dick Van Dyke — that man is a national treasure — because he's married to a woman who is 46 years younger than he is. Leave Dick alone.

Is there an evolutionary reason for prostate pleasure/orgasms?

"Great question," said Dr. Matilda Brindle, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Oxford. "I wish there was more research into this — just as I wish there was more research into the female orgasm. (People just throw their hands up and look the other way because, hey, if it's not a penis, who gives a shit!?!) I'm no expert in this, but my answer would probably be that the prostate is densely packed with nerves because it's crucial for ejaculation, which requires surprisingly precise motor control. For obvious reasons, ejaculating is pretty important for reproduction! So, given that the prostate is a control center for ejaculation, prostate pleasure is probably closely linked to the same neural circuitry that makes penile orgasms feel good. It's possible that prostate-only orgasms could be a way of reinforcing prostate massage, which might help relieve conditions like prostatitis, but there's no solid evidence for this — scientists need to get researching!"

Follow Dr. Brindle on BlueSky @matildabrindle and on Instagram @DrMatildaBrindle.

My metamour is a shitty person. Should I break up with my partner if I can't stand her?

I have to assume you're not the primary partner … because playing the "Her or Me" card would be a primary partner's first move in the case of a shitty metamour. And if you're willing to dump your partner to get away from their other partner without playing the HoM card, that means you could take or leave your partner — whether you're the primary or not — which is a good sign you should leave.

How old is too old for a sex club?

It depends on the club, it depends on the night (some sex clubs have nights for under 30s or under 40s), and it depends on your tolerance for shitty techno music and rejection — but the latter is true for everybody, regardless of age.

Is anal fisting just not possible for some people given their physiology?

Where there's a will, there's a way — except when it comes to fisting, which simply isn't possible for some people. Which is fine; not everything has to be for (or get shoved into) everybody.

I helped a chick I'm dating move and discovered they have a large Nazi flag in their closet. Run?

Yes — but Captain von Trapp that thing first.

Best pegging position for a newbie?

Missionary, doggie, cowgirl — one or all of the usuals should work. Go slow, use lots of lube and let the person being penetrated — the peggee — set the pace!

Am I the only person creeped out by heterosexual couples who look exactly alike?

You are not. At least the people behind the popular Siblings Or Dating? account on Instagram, which has more than a million followers, seem pretty creeped out by it too.

What do you think about the A-Ball from Polari Labs, which is being billed as the first alternative to douching?

So, the A-Ball — a product that does not exist but which is nevertheless being hailed as alternative to douching — is a gelatin egg you're supposed to shove up your ass right before you want to have anal sex. (Think a menstrual cup designed to hold back shit instead of blood.) Some people seem to think it will work — their Kickstarter has raised more than a quarter of a million dollars — but the professionals are dubious. "I don't see how someone can shove a ball up their ass far enough to block poop from coming down," said Dr. Carlton Thomas, a gastroenterologist, award-winning queer health advocate, and co-host of *Butt Honestly*, a podcast that covers backdoor play and health. "I'm concerned about causing obstructions — I'm also concerned about the potential for 'the dam to burst' in the middle of sex and there being a giant mess. But I will reserve final judgment until I get a sample."

P.S. Shoving a gelatin egg up your ass — eggs that melt as the gelatin comes to body temp (hence Dr. Carlton's fear of the dam bursting) — is not new. People who fantasize about aliens laying eggs in them have been using "ovipositor dildos" dildos for years … and making their own gelatin eggs for laying purposes. So, anyone who wants to shove a gelatin ball up their ass to see if it can replace douching (and pray that egg doesn't melt too soon) doesn't have to wait for Polari Labs to release their gelatin eggs. There's already a recipe here.

Everyone on Feeld seems to be shaved or waxed. I rock a trimmed bush. Do I need to put a disclaimer on my profile?

You do not.

I went through my partner's phone and found nothing. I feel guilty about it and don't know if I should confess.

You should not.

Is it normal for a man's orgasms to be stronger in his fifties than they were in his twenties?

It is not.

How does one find a bodybuilder to worship in Minneapolis?

TheBestFlex.com comes highly recommended by a few of my muscle-worshipping friends.

I'm nonbinary AFAB and I overheard my newish and very binary AMAB masc-presenting cis male partner tell a cis friend of theirs that they were into me despite — and I quote — "the annoying nonbinary stuff." They had been drinking when they said this. Is it over?

If you can't respect your partner's gender identity by using his preferred pronouns — surely someone who was assigned male at birth, presents as masc, and is "very binary" uses he/him pronouns — then I don't think you have a future together.

P.S. You opted for 14 syllables and a redundancy (your new male partner was assigned male at birth?) when "boyfriend" (two syllables) was sitting right there. Using a lot of unnecessary jargon is actually kind of annoying — which means your boyfriend might have a point. I'm not suggesting that "nonbinary stuff" is annoying in any objective sense — it most certainly is not — but there could be something annoying about the way you're doing it.

Is it a red flag if someone describes all their exes as "crazy?"

Definitely a red flag. And while people have had the misfortune of dating three or four crazy motherfuckers in a row — stranger things have happened — someone who doesn't realize that describing all their exes as crazy even if all their exes were crazy is waving three different other red flags: no common sense, no judgment, no filters.

I'm into a very specific kink that I've never told anyone about. How late into "dating" is too late to bring it up?

In general, kink cards should be face up on the table no later than three months in — assuming the person you're "dating" is someone you met on a vanilla dating app or in a vanilla setting, e.g. at work, at school, through friends. But it would help to know what very specific kink we're talking about. If you're into feet or fuzzy handcuffs — if you're into a kink that a GGG vanilla person might be willing and able to explore — you should lay those kink cards down without hesitation. But if you're into something more extreme … if you're into shit or puke or aliens laying eggs in your ass … you probably shouldn't be dating vanilla people (or presumed-to-be-vanilla people) at all. Instead, you should find people who share your very specific kink online and date them instead.

Got problems? Yes, you do! Email your question for the column to mailbox@savage.love; or record your question for the Savage Lovecast at savage.love/askdan; podcasts, columns and more at Savage.Love.

THE MOST TONY®-NOMINATED PLAY OF ALL TIME

THE MOST TONY® AWARD-WINNING SHOW OF 2024



STEREOPHONIC

WRITTEN BY
DAVID ADJMI

ORIGINAL SONGS BY
WILL BUTLER

DIRECTED BY
DANIEL AUKIN

PNC Broadway Lights SERIES

APRIL 15-26
KNIGHT THEATER

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